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MYSTERY STORIES

February
1928

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by Leslie McFarlane

The Initiation Death
by R. D. Kingslyn

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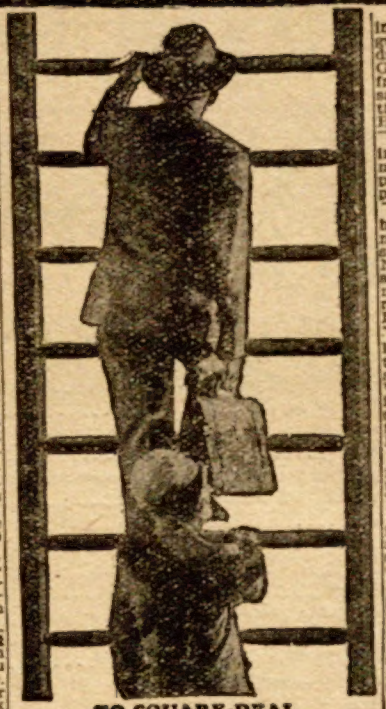

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RALPH CORT, a young American in Hawaii, leads the rescue party when one of the most beautiful residents disappears from "Flappers' Acre," which is quite an institution in that island paradise—paradise as far as climate and scenery are concerned. All of which is described in Raymond Scudder's new complete novelette, THE SAMURAI FAN, which appears in the March issue of MYSTERY STORIES. This is a real mystery tale—the sort that keeps you guessing till the very end. The March cover illustrates a scene from the story. If it doesn't intrigue and interest you, you don't belong among MYSTERY STORIES readers. You're unthrillable!

THE CLOCK THAT TALKED, by Melvin Lostutter, is a strange tale of the Great War—a very strange tale. You've never read anything like it.

THE INSIDE STORY, by Leslie McFarlane, is a grim but fascinating story of the underworld of Montreal. A clever gangster almost gets away with it—almost.

THE RETURN OF SIBELLA is a psychic yarn of an unusual kind. Sylvia Stevenson, who is an English writer of note, gives us a beautiful tale, although it may puzzle you and will undoubtedly make you think.

THE MUFFLED VOLLEY is another Von Karl story—and we think it is the best Richard Wilmer Rowan has written. It will make your blood race.

RUMMY is the funny story of a crook who first broke into a houseboat and then into society. But he broke out again. Carl Clausen wrote the story, which is a guarantee of its excellence.

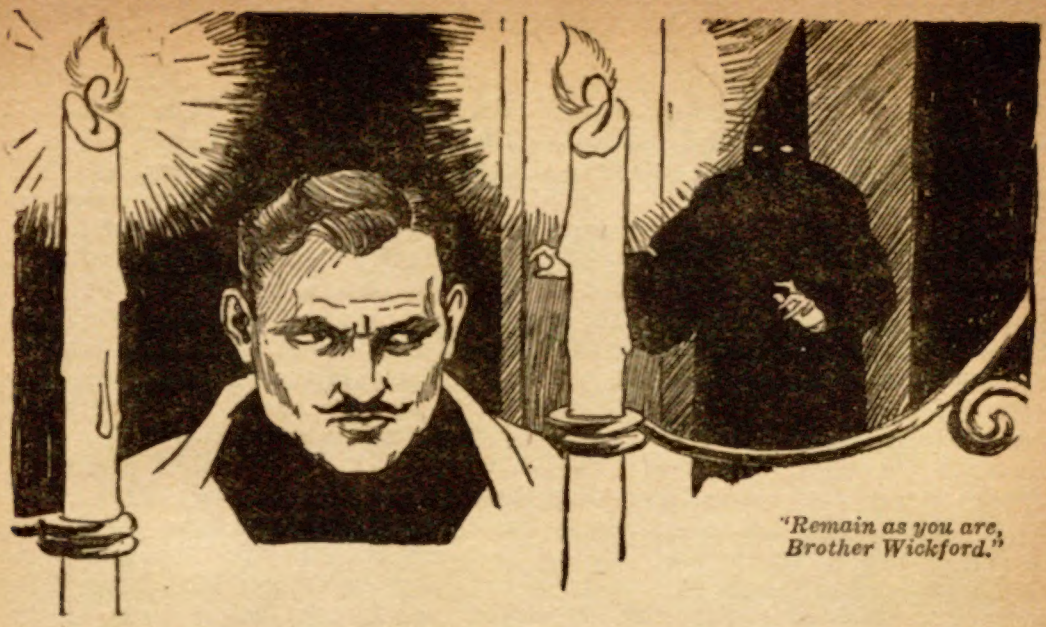
THE BAD BOY FROM BITTER CREEK, by Lupe Loya, is an exciting western tale. Cowboy stuff.

The serial, LONG SHADOWS, by Katharine Haviland Taylor, is a masterpiece among mystery yarns. In the next issue it comes to a smashing climax and finish. You will, of course, be interested to know the outcome of the strange adventures of Angelica Burke.

FAMOUS UNSOLVED MYSTERIES, the series of fact stories by Alvin F. Harlow, is proving an immensely popular feature. This next narrative deals with Charles Ross and his disappearance—a case that startled the country a generation ago.

Other features, too. Altogether, it is a great number.

Don't miss it.



"Remain as you are, Brother Wickford."

The Initiation Death

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

By R. D. KINGSLYN

In all the great fraternal orders—Masons, Elks, Knights of Columbus, Odd Fellows, Knights of Pythias, Loyal Order of Moose, Redmen, and others—good fellowship and brotherly love are supposed to prevail, so the thought of a new member's being brutally slain during the initiation ceremonies seems particularly horrible. De Witt Wickford, the lawyer-detective, whose aid is invoked to solve this mysterious and revolting crime, is a unique character among criminal investigators.

CHAPTER I

THE CORONER'S VERDICT

DE WITT WICKFORD left Hopkinson at the hotel where they had lunched together. He walked leisurely up Madison Avenue to Sixtieth Street, through to the Park, and there strolled for a time while reflecting upon that which the insurance man had confided to him. After half an hour he called up Hopkinson at his office and said he would agree to investigate the Denmar case.

"Fine! Some relief to me!" Hopkinson exclaimed. "If there are any more details you think you want from us——"

"No, thanks," said the lawyer. "This is the outline as I have it." And briefly he rehearsed his conception of the dubious event at Riverford.

A resident of that nearby suburban town, one Charles Denmar, while in the very act of being initiated into a local fraternal order three days before, had died under circumstances traced all about with the extraordinary, the disturbing and mysterious.

Charles Denmar had been taking his "second degree" as an Alert Companion of the Lynx. Suddenly he had been discovered lying unconscious in an inner chamber of the chapter rooms, to which but five members of the initiating body had access at that period of the ceremonies. Though provided with immediate medical attention, Denmar had not revived, but had died twenty minutes later, while being rushed to a hospital.

None intimately in touch with the case seemed to believe that Denmar's death was the result of natural causes. Hopkinson, in particular, scouted the notion, since Denmar had easily passed a rigid physical examination not three months before. He had then taken out a life insurance policy for forty thousand dollars, and it was the liability of paying forth this amount after collecting only an initial premium from the deceased which made Hopkinson's company so eager to know whether Denmar had been a suicide or the victim of a bold and crafty killer.

It had already become known that Denmar's will was a document of recent date, and devoted itself chiefly to a division of that estate comprised by the life insurance: twenty-five thousand dollars to his daughter, Edna; ten thousand dollars to his wife, Marie, oddly enough described as of "present domicile unknown"; and five thousand dollars to the Riverford chapter of the Order of the Lynx, of which obviously the testator was not yet a member when making his considerable bequest. Hopkinson—loyal to the institution importantly employing him—had tried to testify in terms of suicide, while scrupulously giving Wickford all the information in his possession. His interest was so distinct in its bias, he made no hypocritical pretensions whatever.

"Suicide," he had said, "of course invalidates the policy. But if it's murder, we want to know that our bad luck is authentic. The company will have a sort of vested interest in the murderer's being brought to justice."

"Just one question more," said Wickford over the 'phone. "Who is named beneficiary in the Denmar insurance policy? Who would receive the forty thousand dollars, to divide it up as directed by his will?"

"Why, the fraternal order in Riverford. And the will requests the chapter to appoint a committee of three to serve as executors of the estate."

"I see. Well, I'll ring you up tomorrow morning and we'll go out to Riverford together," the lawyer said.

WHEN he had telephoned his own office and told his secretary he need not be expected there for at least two hours, Wickford set forth in a taxi, stopping first at the plant of a great metropolitan daily. Here he found a friend who admitted a wide editorial acquaintance with the secret societies of North America. But the Lynx were declared of such recent origin, there was little to be said about them over and above their resemblance to many similar organizations. Stopping at the Public Library, the lawyer discovered nothing more distinctive about the

Lynx, but did locate a body of material having to do with fraternal orders, which he eventually might want to have summarized by Miss Welsh, his secretary.

He had not entirely consumed the promised two hours when he climbed the aged and creaky stairs and came to the door with his name lettered upon it.

"A Dr. Parker has 'phoned you twice," said Miss Welsh when he entered. "He seemed so urgent that I said you would return at four-thirty, and made an appointment. He and his friends were in town only this afternoon, he explained, and they must see you to-day if possible."

"Where do they come from?"

"From Riverford, he said."

"Indeed?"

THE lawyer went into his private office, and a few moments later, at 4:33, was receiving Dr. Parker and two other men in that celebrated sanctum. The doctor, as spokesman, introduced himself and then his associates, Messrs. Raines and Gillen.

"We are lucky to reach you on such short notice," Parker added. "Of course, we had heard of you, Mr. Wickford; but we hadn't thought to call upon you in this matter, till Mr. Hopkinson advised it."

"He advised you to see me this afternoon?"

"Yes. I talked to him by telephone, about three o'clock. He told me you had agreed to act for his company in the case of our late member, Charles Denmar."

Wickford, having arranged to visit Riverford with Hopkinson on the morrow, felt reasonably sure that the insurance man had not advised this meeting. He invited them to be seated and himself sat waiting for enlightenment.

"Mr. Denmar's will, you see, is an uncommon one," the physician resumed.

"Hopkinson told me."

"Quite so. He must have heard of it from Miss Edna Denmar—a very nice girl. It is really in her behalf that we are acting—though I regret to say she is showing a degree of antagonism toward our membership——"

"I assume that you three gentlemen are the chosen committee who'll serve as executors of the Denmar estate?"

"Yes," said Gillen.

Parker at once began an involved narrative of the copy of Denmar's will on file with the secretary of their chapter, Mr. Raines, and of the special meeting called the evening before, at which they had been appointed as a committee to act as Denmar had requested.

While he talked, Wickford was observing the visible characteristics of his callers. In apparel and physical appearance they were singularly uniform: men in their early forties, he judged, reasonably prosperous, typically solid citizens of a suburban town. The doctor looked to be the natural leader, though less aggressive and magnetic than Gillen. Raines, because he maintained a politely attentive silence, seemed the most intelligent. But, if no cynic, Wickford never applied optimism to any intelligence rating, allowing deeds and not words to impress him, and accounting absence of words as diffidence or timidity more often than as proof of profound reserve.

"You speak of Miss Denmar's antagonism," said the lawyer when Parker had run down. "Does it mean that she believes her father was murdered?"

The committeemen displayed their

shock with the same uniformity to be noted in the pattern of their calmer expressions. Parker cleared his throat a bit pompously and threatened further oration.

"Mr. Hopkinson doesn't consider murder for a moment," said the suddenly inspired Raines.

"If he did not, I should hardly have been retained."

"Then he does?" Gillen queried.

"Perhaps," said Wickford with a smile, "it would be more accurate to say—I have been retained so that Mr. Hopkinson and other officials of the insurance company can make up their minds."

"Of course," Gillen agreed, his affable talents to the fore, "and we are here to coöperate with you, Mr. Wickford."

DR. PARKER was not longer to be interrupted, however; and he stood up to secure the desired attention of them all.

"Quite so — quite so," said he. "And we can no doubt save your valuable time, sir, by giving you our solemn word: it was not murder."

"You were present at the — the fatal initiation ceremony?"

"I presided," said Parker, and looked it.

"Naturally, I do not wish to pry into the inner workings of your order, gentlemen," Wickford lied with the most persuasive blandness, "but tell me——"

"You must realize that in regard to our ritual and the routine of initiation, our lips are inevitably sealed," answered the doctor ponderously and almost reproachfully.

"Wasn't that rather awkward at the inquest?"

"Not in the least. I am coroner in Riverford."

"How fortunate! And the jury you impaneled?"

"I was entirely within my rights in selecting only members of our order," said Parker a bit defensively. "Out of respect for our departed brother, and in order to permit an unfortunate local curiosity to subside, we sealed our verdict——"

"I should expect any such measure to quicken the curious," Wickford commented.

It seemed to him that both Gillen and Raines nodded a slight agreement. Evidently Dr. Parker, as coroner, had done some more presiding.

"We merely sealed our verdict until to-morrow morning," the doctor explained. "Riverford is afflicted with an editor who tries to make his paper sensational. It is really he who has stirred up talk in this Denmar case. But it will be stale news if it has been talked about a day before he can publish a word about our verdict."

"I see," the lawyer said. "And the verdict is?"

"Death from accidental causes."

Wickford stood up and faced him, neither angrily nor defiantly, but rather as one who would terminate a fruitless interview.

"Of course, the insurance company cannot be expected to accept a questionable job of whitewashing," he said pleasantly. "I am not surprised that under the unusual circumstances you gentlemen wish neither for murder nor suicide in your initiation——"

"My honor as a physician and public official——" Parker began to storm, but Gillen and Raines rose briskly and began to assuage their colleague's pompous wrath.

"I'm sure," said Gillen, "that you are judging us too hastily, Mr. Wickford." He was amiable and familiar, the good mixer and promoter of fraternal good will, entirely sure of himself. Wickford was surprised to find himself disliking this man even more than Parker, a blustering ego-

tist of a sort to be met in many legal controversies. "I knew Denmar quite well," Gillen went on. "He was a florid chap, with high blood pressure. Our initiation is an arduous one, though without nonsense and horse-play. Denmar was nearly through it, and, I may say, had been kneeling for perhaps ten minutes. It appears that he became dizzy and fainted. He fell over while in a room alone, striking his head against —well, against a kind of altar which we use during the ceremony. Concussion resulted, and he died without regaining consciousness."

"I was able to attend him the moment he was discovered," Parker put in haughtily. "Everything that could be done was done. He was a heavy man and fell heavily. An uncommon case, perhaps, but only because of the time and place of the fatal accident."

"But it must be clear to you, gentlemen," the lawyer replied, "that, since your lodge or chapter benefits to the sum of five thousand dollars, your position would be an infinitely less delicate one if you had insisted upon disinterested persons handling all this—inquest, verdict, autopsy, and so on."

"I MADE an autopsy, and my report is an official record, sir," said Parker. "As for this paltry five thousand, we are not poor men, and we are substantially the founders of a great fraternal order. We knew nothing of the provisions of Denmar's will. The copy on file with Raines here was sealed. That can be sworn to by a dozen of our members. We do not need the money, I assure you, and as executors of the estate we will not attempt to collect the insurance if it means the stirring up of fresh scandal."

Wickford did not conceal his wonder.

"Do you mean that Mr. Denmar leaves so much, his heirs—the widow and daughter—can afford to waive claim to thirty-five thousand dollars?" he questioned.

"I think the insurance is about all he does leave," Raines answered frankly. "I recall his once saying——"

Parker checked the disclosure with a frown.

"In short," Wickford pursued, "you mean to use your authority as executors, gentlemen, to spare your secret society from an unwelcome notoriety? I fancy Miss Denmar might legitimately protest——"

"She's one who can take care of herself," Parker snapped. "And, let me remind you, you represent only the insurance company in this. If my coroner's verdict isn't good enough, then let Hopkinson and his crooked company keep some more money due to widows and orphans."

His peroration was muffled by its own silliness. Gillen grinned at the lawyer, as if saying that they, recognized as men of the world, must indulge such bunk on occasion. But Wickford was already starting to usher all three of them from his office.

"We are at cross purposes," said he, "and any further discussion here would be useless. To-morrow afternoon I shall come to Riverford. I shall call on you gentlemen or any other of your members for whatever information I may legally require." He paused. They were at the door. And his final challenge he aimed directly at the fuming Dr. Parker. "Of course, my client, the insurance company, cannot afford to be characterized as crooked. Please remember that I have been retained only to see that justice is done—to all concerned."

CHAPTER II

A LONELY GIRL

THE noted criminal lawyer, by arrangement with Hopkinson, went out to Riverford alone next morning on an earlier train than they had intended taking together. He proceeded to call first at the office of the Riverford newspaper, sending in his card to Marshall Morgan, the editor of the *Times-Union*. Morgan received him at once and very cordially. It was an honor, said he, to be of any service to De Witt Wickford, whose exploits in exceptional cases of crime were as well known in Riverford as in New York.

"You are here, of course, about the Denmar mystery?" the editor inquired.

"Then it is locally regarded as a mystery? May I see the files of your paper covering the whole case?" the lawyer asked.

Morgan, a young man of manifest energy and command, swept up from his desk a bundle of clippings fastened together at the top.

"There you are," said he. "Keep them. I have several sets of duplicates."

Wickford thanked him and offered to pursue his reading elsewhere.

"Sit right here. Make this office your headquarters," Morgan urged. "I'm so glad a real man has come out to prod into this thing, you may use our whole plant if it will serve you."

Wickford liked the young editor, but suspected his extraordinary zeal. He recalled Parker's declaration: that the town was "afflicted" with a newspaper of sensational tendencies, and that it was its editor who had stirred up "talk" in the Denmar case.

"I represent only the insurance company, of course," said the lawyer, "and since there is no police aspect to my work, I don't think I can agree to—well, to collaborate with the press, as I have on other occasions."

Morgan's smile was winning.

"Of course. I understand," he said. "But it doesn't happen to be the story in this which mainly interests me, Mr. Wickford. I am thinking also of Miss Denmar," he added. He rose and crossed the room and shut the office door.

"Tell me about her. I take it you know her."

"Rather," said Morgan. "But at that she figures in this matter merely as the principal heir."

"And she is going to need a good lawyer."

Morgan grinned happily.

"You said you will represent only the insurance company," he observed. "I guess we understand each other. I have heard how squarely you conduct all your investigations."

"Miss Denmar shall not suffer, I promise you. I am not disposed to believe that Charles Denmar committed suicide," Wickford said.

"He wasn't the type, not often moody or melancholy—no hysteria in his make-up, and no motive. Besides, only a lunatic would go clear through an initiation ceremony and then kill himself."

"That doesn't follow," said the lawyer. "Until we know just what the ceremony consisted of, we cannot be emphatic in arguing that it didn't induce pain, hysteria, or a reasonable motive for suicide."

"YOU don't expect these sworn and secret Lynx brothers to describe their initiation, do you?" Morgan exclaimed. "Wait till you meet some of them."

"I have already met three. Dr. Parker and Messrs. Gillen and Raines were at my office yesterday."

"Oh, the mighty executors!" there was an unmistakable sneer in the young editor's tone. "Parker," he continued, "was a pretty good doctor till he got a political bee. The first day he conducted a coroner's inquest, he commenced seeing himself in the toga of the United States Senate. Raines is a genial sort of rubber stamp, sells automobile insurance and joins every lodge he can to increase his trade. Gillen is the real brains of this Lynx organization. He has lived in town about a year now, and I suspect whatever money he has came from work done as a professional organizer. He's nursed this Lynx order here for months."

"One moment," said Wickford. "Your antagonism toward these men is pretty apparent. I may say they also registered with me a grievance against your paper. Moreover, they seemed to think that Miss Denmar herself is rather unduly antagonistic toward their membership."

"And why not?" Morgan cried. "Edna believes that one of those birds murdered her father. I share her view, though I wasn't crazy about Denmar personally." He paused in some embarrassment, but proceeded evenly: "Here is where I stand, Mr. Wickford. I'm no joiner, and I declined a bid to be a charter member of their chapter. Gillen made it plain enough that I'd be well repaid for any advertising I could contrive in the paper. They propose to build a national body, with the usual insurance, death benefits, and so on, and he has already planted three other chapters in neighboring towns. But when I refused, we parted friends. Gillen is not a bad sort if you don't see too much of him. And the others are mostly fatheads like Parker, or figureheads and bottle-washers like Raines. They've been glad enough, all of them, to get into print, so if they're now sore at my paper, it is strictly on account of my refusing to hush up the singular extinction of their new brother, Denmar."

Wickford had begun to feel closer to important truths than at any moment since Hopkinson described the situation in Riverford.

"Do you mean," he asked, "that they deliberately urged you to hush up facts in this case?"

"About a dozen different ones came in and dropped heavy hints. I think some nine of that dozen advertise in the *Times-Union*, though not very recklessly."

"I SEE. And now, may I be so personal as to inquire again about Miss Edna Denmar?"

"I suppose I'm like a pane of glass where she is concerned," Morgan confessed engagingly. "You see, she came to work for us about two weeks after she and her father moved here. That was only five months ago. But she has been promoted twice and is now my secretary. I may add that she will become my wife whenever I can get her to agree to it."

"And the late Charles Denmar opposed your suit?"

"You guess that because I said I wasn't crazy about the man. Well, he never precisely opposed me—he opposed marriage in general," said Morgan. "Lord, he was bitter about it! And also, he claimed Edna was too young. She is almost nineteen. And he objected because he thought there might be gossip if her engagement to me, her employer, were announced so soon after she came to work here."

"A very cautious parent, at least."

"More like a stepfather, really."

"How so, if I may ask?"

"Denmar had an odd, surly streak in him," the young editor replied.

"He was kind to Edna, but often absurdly strict, harsh and suspicious even. Do you know, for some weeks I had him sized up as a man with a pretty dark past left not far behind him—who had been in prison, or lived down a lurid disgrace. Only since his death has Edna explained it.

"It seems," he went on, "that when she was not yet two years old, her mother eloped with a supposed friend of the family. It terribly embittered her father. And he brought her up in his stern, exacting way—I suppose because he feared her mother's gay outbreak might one day reappear in some impulsive behavior of hers."

"We are getting on," said Wickford. "But you now suggest a man who might commit suicide. And you do not depict a popular man, who would be joining secret societies. Though his preference for masculine society is to be understood, and with the bars down in a new organization——"

"Just so. Gillen and Parker and the few others who think they're insiders with them have been ready to rope in anybody. For all their tall talk, the Lynx are about as difficult and exclusive as a political rally. Yet even so," the other concluded, "I never understood how they persuaded Denmar. He was not sociable, and no spender. And I have heard him ridicule organizations of much better standing than the Lynx. I dare say Gillen showed him a profit in it."

"I wonder!" Wickford reflected for a moment, and idly scanned the clipped news stories Morgan had provided him. "I suppose," said he, "that Miss Denmar is not at work to-day? Do you think she would see me for a few moments at her home?"

"I'm sure she would—it's 97 Monmouth Place. I'll ring her up and tell her about you," Morgan offered with proprietary display. "Then come back here," he urged. "I may have a genuine surprise for you." And when the lawyer whimsically begged to know the nature of this potential shock, the editor fairly whispered: "It's rather gruesome, and hateful, too, in a way—considering my feelings for Edna. But I have taken no stock in Parker's autopsy or his coroner's verdict. The *Times-Union* is not without political influence in this county, and right now, down at the undertaker's, Hawley, a county detective, and a physician engaged by me are examining Denmar's body, to determine just what did kill him."

Wickford applauded his resolution.

"I'll go to 97 Monmouth Place, pay my respects to Miss Denmar, and return," he said.

FIFTEEN minutes later the lawyer approached the small house, No. 97, which had been Charles Denmar's home. Modest recognition of the mourning within was displayed beside the door. And when he rang the bell, Edna Denmar herself admitted him.

His apologies for an unseemly intrusion she waved aside. Mr. Morgan, said she, had telephoned and explained. She was attractive and remarkably poised, scarcely looking the nineteen years Morgan had indicated; dark and pallid and intelligent, dressed all in white and making no show of a deep sorrow which, to judge by the editor's candid account, she possibly did not feel.

Wickford ventured to speak of the insurance which might be in dispute. Mr. Morgan, she said, would advise her when the matter came up. But, she added, she did not know how to communicate with her mother.

This, Wickford thought, saddened the girl more than any allusion to the recent death. Perhaps all her life she had been hearing the derelict parent condemned. But she could not have shared her father's bitterness; and now that he lay dead, she must be yearning for the other—her mother, strange to her and far away. Or even near at hand? She could not tell.

For five minutes more he talked to Edna Denmar kindly and casually. She was smiling a little when he shook hands and vowed he would stand her friend, with Marshall Morgan's permission. And she said with evident sincerity that she needed friends and would hope to see him again. Wickford, bowing gallantly so that the flickering smile increased, declared he would make a special point of it.

WALKING back to the newspaper office, the lawyer pondered those points of impressive information which he had gained from his brief interview with Denmar's daughter. It did not seem to him that they clouded the case; ultimately, he felt, they might clarify it.

Edna Denmar had said her father was not actively in business at the time of the fatal initiation. He had been a promoter, and she had thought he intended soon taking it up again. He was "lining up some capital," he had told her, though never communicative about his income or any financial affairs.

They had moved from the West rather suddenly. And Denmar had said to her, about settling in Riverford, that their fortunes would be made there—his exact words, as she recalled, though enthusiasm and overstatement were also traits uncommon to him. Wickford had wondered how such a man could succeed as a promoter. Pressing his inquiry in adroit phrases, he was given to understand that Charles Denmar never had been very successful in his promotions.

But he had been kind and proud. He had argued that she need not go to work, the girl explained. But she was old enough, and had studied in a commercial school. She greatly disliked feeling herself a dependent. And here, as she spoke, the lawyer had thought he discovered a hint of rancor. Dependence, even as a memory, lingered to torment her sturdy spirit. Whereas her mother had run away——

But Denmar—why had he expected to enrich himself in Riverford? Why had he waited in seeming composure for his fortune to fasten upon him? Real estate? Not likely, since the whole countryside had suffered from high pressure development. The organizing of the Lynx? But hardly—for Edna Denmar had herself corroborated Marshall Morgan's remark, that her father had often scoffed at the pretentious hocus-pocus of secret and fraternal orders, and had favored clubs and lodges alike with his inveterate jeers.

AND now Wickford's curious reflections were interrupted by a hearty hail—he was welcomed in Riverford!

Across the main street stood Dr. Parker and Gillen. Parker's bow was frigid, but Gillen projected enough cordiality for them both.

"Come in to see me," he beckoned, and his gesture pointed out that local pride, a fine, five-story office building, as the place wherein he could be found.

"Be with you presently," Wickford responded.

When he arrived in Marshall Morgan's office, the young editor

was conferring with two other visitors—a tall, lean, studious-appearing young man, introduced as Dr. Lester, and the brawny and red-faced Michael Hawley, county detective beyond mistake.

"You're just in time, Mr. Wickford!" Morgan exclaimed. "You found Edna all that I represented? Of course you did!" He was surpassing even that professional mixer, Gillen, in his far flung exuberance. "The Denmar case," said he, "is moving swiftly now. And it's murder."

"Homicide," said Hawley, manifestly not more impressed by the event than by De Witt Wickford's being concerned with it. "I'd take an oath——"

"And I," the doctor agreed, as one who knows his verification will count in a court of law. "Denmar died a violent death. He had been struck a heavy blow with a—a blunt instrument, as the saying is—struck just at the base of the brain. The skull was fractured, crushed like an egg-shell. I'm surprised he didn't die instantly."

"Perhaps he did," Wickford said.

"We have only their story for any of the circumstances," Morgan submitted.

The detective snorted.

"And their story is going to take a lot of explaining, me lad," said he, "from now on."

CHAPTER III

A CURIOUS DECISION

THE coroner's verdict, which Parker and his hand-picked jurymen had thoughtfully sealed, remained in that reserved state, though the substance of it had been freely rumored in Riverford.

It was a very different and deflated Dr. Parker who received Marshall Morgan and Hawley and Wickford in his office at a quarter past twelve. For professional reasons, Dr. Lester had asked to be excused; but the editor, the detective, and the lawyer each had a copy of his affidavit relating to Denmar's death. And it seemed to be directly after reading his colleague's sworn statement that Parker so visibly altered in tone and bearing.

"Good God! You aren't actually accusing me of shielding a murderer?" he cried.

Hawley looked precisely as if he were so charging all the local members of the Lynx, but especially their presiding officer.

"The *Times-Union*, which you have called sensational, is merely seeking the truth," Morgan put in. "As a public official, Doctor, we shall not be able to ignore your negligence."

"Oh—negligence," Parker sighed, as if already relieved of serious blame. And he added: "You can't accuse us all, you can't indict a whole lodge."

"I don't see what else an unprejudiced Grand Jury can do," Wickford said, flinging his premeditated bombshell.

"Why—why—what do you mean?" Parker gasped.

"Simply this—Mr. Denmar died under very suspicious circumstances. Regardless of motive, which has yet to be touched upon, he appears to have been murdered in the midst of your initiation ceremonies. What occurred there all of your members must be bound by oath not to reveal. Therefore, all of your members become accessories after the fact, at the least. You must either make the murderer among you confess and give himself up, or a guilty knowledge of this extraordinary crime will seem to be shared by you all."

Morgan and Hawley supported the

lawyer's argument with admiring nods. Parker rose and paced the floor in unfeigned agitation. Possibly he had no fear for himself, but saw many bright dreams—political, fraternal, financial—lying shattered by this logic. He brought repeatedly from his pocket a large white handkerchief to dry his streaming countenance.

"I NEVER liked Denmar," he blurted.

"Eh?" the detective questioned sharply.

"I don't mean I greatly disliked him," Parker hastened to add. "I was rather indifferent. And I certainly didn't kill him, or want him killed."

"I take it you did nothing to prevent his being admitted to your chapter of the Lynx?" Wickford said.

"There were several of us who opposed Denmar's admission. But Gillen was all for enlarging the membership at once, and Gillen can be very persuasive——"

"Assuming that Denmar was murdered, Doctor," said Marshall Morgan, "what reason would you assign the killer in selecting your initiation ceremony to mask his crime?"

"Some outsider wishing to discredit our order," Parker replied without hesitation.

"Could you prove that any outsider had access to the room in which poor Denmar knelt to take his degree—his fatal degree?" Wickford said.

"There were just five of you," Morgan reminded him.

"Yes; Raines and Gillen and myself," said the harassed Doctor, "and Probst and Hanlon." He paused and seemed casting about him vaguely for ways of escape. "It's awful," he murmured. "What shall we do?"

"Better just tell all you know," Hawley warned.

"But I will—I will, all that I dare. I can't forget my fraternal oath," Parked protested.

"I advise," Wickford said, "that you call immediately a special meeting of your chapter. Make it clear to them that there is imperative need for alibis for the five of you, who are, I assume, the chief local officers of your order. I for one, Doctor, do not wish to be hard on you. No doubt you have a heavy investment of time and money in the building up of this fraternal organization. You blundered in using your authority as coroner to try to pass off Denmar's death as an ordinary mishap. But your sole thought was for the credit of the chapter, its dignity and esteem in the community. And now you must see that there will be no chapter of the Lynx in this town if you and these others are indicted for murder. You have to help us uncover the real murderer, to save the rest."

"I understand," said Parker.

He sat down again, a pitiful and shaken man—his face ashen, his lips an unhealthy purple, and with a trembling hand he reached once more for the handkerchief, now moist and limp, to dab at his forehead with it ineffectually.

"Better just tell us how it all happened, Doc," Hawley urged. And Wickford saw that Morgan also believed they were confronting the guilty member who had slain Charles Denmar in the midst of his initiation.

But the lawyer in his time had seen much of those who, pompous and self-important, are suddenly crushed in conceit or aspiration. He did not believe that Parker had done the killing, though he might have been a reluctant accomplice. There was still a motive for murder to

be found before any case existed deserving a jury's interpretation.

"I swear I didn't do it. I don't know a thing about it. I don't see how it could have been murder," Parker contrived to protest. "None of us knew Denmar well. I remember that was argued a good deal at the meeting the night we finally voted him in. Gillen said he seemed mild and decent enough, and might turn out a good worker. He said we'd need a few such fellows on the ground floor, to use as traveling agents—since most of us have professions or business here and couldn't afford to leave."

"And you argue," Morgan said, "that since you didn't know Denmar well, none of you, there was no reason to kill him? But somebody did kill him, Doctor, and you have already gone on record to Mr. Wickford that you believed his death due to an accidental fall."

"HE STRUCK his head heavily ——" Parker began.

"He didn't strike it, but somebody else did," the editor snapped. "And that somebody struck so hard that Denmar would have had to fall ten or fifteen feet to get a similar impact accidentally. Lester saw that at once, but you as coroner and right on the scene overlooked it."

For a moment Parker forgot his plight and bridled arrogantly.

"I'm not aware that you, Morgan, have been appointed special prosecutor——"

"You don't seem aware of anything. You're hardly conscious," the younger man retorted. "Get wise to to-day!"

"Honest and open coöperation, Doctor, is your only sane course now," Wickford admonished him.

"It's near time I went and got me some warrants for you and your birds of secrecy," Hawley threatened.

THEY were interrupted by the arrival of Gillen, who appeared not to suspect the swift misfortune that was descending upon his fraternal creation. He was smiling; he shook hands with Wickford, ignored Parker's feeble greeting, and let himself be presented to Hawley with gusto. A veteran collector of acquaintances, he obviously rejoiced in any new name. He said he was glad he'd dropped in. And Morgan did not add that this was a detective already much prejudiced against the Lynx and all their works.

However, the editor and Hawley straightway set forth the local chapter's situation in the Denmar case. Gillen listened with unconcealed distress and a degree of horror which yet contrasted favorably with all the reactions of Parker. And Gillen, when allowed to speak, said at once that all their members must be informed without delay. He reproached himself, he declared, for ever suggesting Charles Denmar as a member. After all, they did know very little about him. Evidently he had moved into Riverford for some reason associated with fear or pursuit. And his enemy had none the less found him out, and had slain him with a stealth and cunning which now must ruin them all.

Perhaps Gillen was a shade too emotional and too eloquent and contrite. But Hawley and Morgan, and Parker, too, were agreeably impressed, it seemed. And Wickford expected a man who knew he could talk well to do his best when needing time to think in any such swift emergency.

"Let me get them together, please," Gillen was urging. "Don't rush us, Mr. Hawley—though I'm aware you must do your duty. But

just let us have our special meeting and thrash this thing out. The chapter's honor is at stake, and so be assured we'll suspend our rules or rescind an oath, or in some way manage to put ourselves entirely at your disposal. Poor old Denmar," he continued, "was not alone in that room more than eight minutes." It appeared to Wickford that Parker showed surprise at this revelation.

"The room has only two small windows, which were locked and heavily curtained, but not barred. In that eight minutes somebody broke in and—and did it."

"If Denmar feared for his life, as you suggest," said Morgan, "wouldn't he have been more alert? Wouldn't you have heard him cry out when this alleged enemy of his intruded?"

"He wasn't facing both windows," Parker replied. "Perhaps what he heard he thought only a part of the initiation."

"That sounds reasonable," Hawley conceded.

AND then Wickford said: "But now about the weapon or blunt instrument used? Are you gentlemen prepared to swear there was nothing found in the room, and no article or part of your equipment there which could have been used to strike a terrific and almost noiseless blow?"

"Yes, absolutely," Parker replied.

"And furthermore," said Gillen, "the five of us who, as part of the ceremony, were going into and coming from that inner room, couldn't have brought in a weapon or instrument or—even accidentally—carried it out again."

"Why not?" Morgan snapped, detecting the nearly impregnable alibi.

"It's true," agreed Parker. "Our—our ceremonial robes are very heavy and almost new. Our chapter rooms, being badly ventilated, become oppressively close when closed up for secret meetings. It was rather a mild night. The five of us, who were to wear the more elaborate robes, dressed in them together, as we generally do. Gillen, I remember your complaining of the ordeal of heat in store for us."

"Yes," responded Gillen; "and you and Hanlon jumped on me for changing the by-laws so that we could initiate one man at a time, instead of waiting for a class to assemble. I retorted that we needed the money, and Raines said we needed it to build our own lodge with a specially ventilated room for initiation and secret meetings."

"What's all this got to do with the weapon which struck down Denmar?" Hawley demanded.

"Nothing directly," Parker answered. "But the five of us who might have seen or used or concealed any such weapon undressed together, down to our underwear, and put on our robes and vestments. Afterward, when Denmar was found unconscious and we were waiting to take him to the hospital, while somebody went out to get a car ready, we hurriedly disrobed again and put on our street clothes. None of us, I'm sure, could have concealed the murderous instrument which seems to have been used."

"Oh, I don't know—in all that confusion," the detective retorted. "You don't all sit around in masks, do you? So that a stranger could slip in?"

"Certainly not," Gillen said. "If you'll just give us a little time, our chapter will surely be able to run this thing to earth, and help you to discover the killer. You must see that it's complicated and baffling, and it'll require all our heads put together to locate the truth." He continued so persuasively that Hawley

and even Morgan yielded him the time he begged—a day—for private investigation and inquiry among the members of the fraternal order. And as he talked, Wickford could understand how the unprepossessing Denmar had come to be admitted to their membership.

The lawyer himself was persuaded to accept an invitation to dine in the Gillen home. Wickford did not want to obligate himself in any way to a member of the troubled chapter of the Lynx; but to deny Gillen, so anxious to be cordial, would have amounted to a direct insult or accusation.

WICKFORD lunched with Morgan and Hawley, and then devoted the next five hours largely to meeting available members of the Lynx, starting with Probst and Hanlon, two unhappy suspects, who shared with Parker, Gillen, and Raines the now unwelcome distinction of having seen Charles Denmar in his last conscious moments. Probst, an elderly jeweler, had been modestly successful in Riverford, and was accounted a pioneer. Hanlon was a real estate operator of moderate pretensions. Each, like Raines, was a "joiner," friendly, genial, and unaffected; and neither seemed more likely to have participated in a crime of violence than an average taxpayer in any small and placid community.

Before going to dinner, Wickford stopped off with Morgan at the Denmar home, there to examine certain old letters and private papers of her father's which Edna Denmar had just brought to light. But these contributed nothing to fill in the void that engulfed whatever had been the motive of the slayer. There was, in fact, but one item of interest—a photograph torn across and across.

"My—my mother, I suppose," said the girl as she handed over the four pieces, her lips twitching painfully, her eyes bright with sudden anguish. "I can't remember her. But my father always said I didn't look like her at all."

This appeared to be true, and not merely Denmar's persisting bitterness. Wickford and the editor fitted the fragments together, and saw a pretty young woman in a white frock designed according to the modest fashions of 1910. Denmar no doubt had intended to destroy this last memento of the faithless one. Yet very carefully he had saved the quartered picture of his wife—it had hardly faded at all, being seldom, if ever, exposed to light—and it seemed a veritable symbol of their shattered life together.

With Morgan the lawyer agreed that this was important and must be copied expertly, as copies might be needed in prosecuting a thorough search for the lady of "present domicile unknown," in accordance with the bequest of Denmar's will. And Wickford was still thinking of that pitifully mutilated photograph as he rode across town to the Gillen residence on North York Street.

HERE he found a pleasant and unostentatious home, and Mrs. Gillen, a charming hostess. An attractive woman of thirty-eight or nine, she was slender and blonde and quietly hospitable, in direct contrast to her husband, who manifestly adored her, but whose manner as host was not far removed from the boisterous. Yet if Gillen's notion of friendship at first sight was swiftly tiresome, the dinner was excellent and served with taste and becoming simplicity. And their conversation never touched upon such grave matters as Denmar's fractured cranium or the plight that invested the Lynx of Riverford.

At a quarter to eight Gillen had

to excuse himself. He must do some telephoning and then proceed to the special meeting of the lodge. But he insisted that the lawyer should not hurry away, simply because he had to; so Wickford lingered politely for half an hour, chatting with Mrs. Gillen, before he took his leave to catch a train back to New York.

From the Penn Terminal he telephoned to Hopkinson at his hotel. The insurance man eagerly heard a report of that day's happenings in the curious case of the initiation death, and he inquired Wickford's plan for the morrow.

"The entire procedure of their ritual and initiating ceremonies has to be found out," said the lawyer. "I have decided to join the Lynx, my friend. They must, however, consent to initiate me at once and in full. I think I am of a calibre to warrant the honor. It's about the only way they—the majority, at least—can spare themselves a nasty trial and exposure. And I can go through with it, whereas a police or county official could not—take their oath, I mean, pay my fees, and be a regular candidate."

"And then what?" the amazed Hopkinson queried.

Wickford chuckled.

"When I have taken the degree that Charles Denmar took, I'll know exactly how he was slain."

"Will you know who did it?"

"I think so," replied Wickford.

"And will you know why he did it?"

"I already know why," said Wickford.

CHAPTER IV

ACCEPTED

IT WAS a flattering thing to have so busy an executive as Hopkinson call before eight o'clock in the morning. Yet at 7:45 next day Hopkinson called upon De Witt Wickford and talked while the lawyer ate a leisurely and epicurean breakfast.

"I merely wanted you to find out whether it was suicide and we didn't have to pay Denmar's insurance, or any other sort of death and we did," he declared. "Now it's come out as a murder, and we'll pay, of course. That ends the case for us, and for you too, Wickford. Just send in your bill, and you'll have our check as promptly as these Denmar executors."

The lawyer spread marmalade upon a thin triangle of toast before he replied.

"I expressly forbid you to send any insurance check to Denmar's executors as elected by a body of men that includes, it would appear, the slayer of Denmar," said he. "I am not through with this case. It presents a fascinating problem. If you are firing me, Hopkinson," he added with a sly grin, "then I shall attach myself to the Lynx, to the innocent majority who'll need me, be assured. Or I can represent Miss Edna Denmar, a very lovely girl whose life so far has not been crowded with an overplus of happiness."

"Stick to the case if you must waste valuable time," the other retorted. "But I haven't slept from worrying about this mad idea of your being initiated——"

"Since when did novelty bring you insomnia?"

"It's not a joking matter," Hopkinson persisted. "Don't you understand that there is a killer in their crowd, and if he thinks you've got or are getting his number, he'll do for you just what he did to Denmar? It's my opinion that Denmar was only joining them to get him, but he sprang his own little trap first, and Denmar it was who took the one-way ticket while he knelt in fraternal meditation."

Wickford started to speak, but the other continued: "Of course, I don't say you aren't a lot smarter than Denmar must have been. You're a match for any one crook anywhere, and have proved it time and again, Wickford. But in this it looks to me as if there must be a leader and several accomplices. And how can you prevail against dirty teamwork?"

"That's just it, my anxious friend —I must know how many are really involved in this," the lawyer said. "If one man did it alone—and there is only motive for one—it constitutes nearly the boldest crime on record."

But he declined to reveal his deductions as to the motive in Denmar's slaying.

"I guess you'll find the whole crowd mixed up in it. Great Scott! —how could it be otherwise, with that initiation business going on?" said Hopkinson. "They're probably well named—the Lynx. A fierce and cruel beast, swift and deadly in attack, always getting the jump—for its weight the toughest fighter and surest killer of all the cats," he declared.

NEVERTHELESS, De Witt Wickford went forth to join and conquer. He took the 9:52 train and was in Morgan's office at a quarter to eleven. Riverford, said the editor, was drenched with rumor, though his own morning paper had endeavored to be conservative, in keeping with the promises he and Hawley had made to Gillen. But the local gossips had mobilized overnight; and not even on the evening that Charles Denmar died sensationally had there been such ardent comment and whispered speculations.

When Michael Hawley joined them he was full of lamentations about his having let "that smooth guy Gillen" argue him out of a whole day in which some drastic action ought to have been taken.

"You've been talking to Thomas," said Morgan.

Wickford already knew of Thomas, the county prosecutor, young and able and politically ambitious, his eye on Trenton and the Governor's selection of the next Attorney General. Gilbert Thomas hoped eventually to be governor himself. He had need of only one celebrated case to point him on his way, and a vigorous handling of the Denmar murder might make him a national figure—briefly, but long enough for the proper effect upon the state machine of his party.

Hawley, however, stoutly denied that he had yet consulted his superior.

"It's him I'm scared of," the detective complained. "Even over to the county seat they'll get wise to these here rumors flying about. And then Thomas will come down on me neck—you know how."

Here Wickford interrupted to outline his own private project. But first he dwelt at length upon the difficulties that even a Thomas must encounter in seeking to indict nearly thirty citizens of good repute for a crime as obscured as this one. He said he wanted to get the facts; that Hawley and Thomas might cast lots for the glory. He would be initiated, and then would put his findings at the disposal of the State.

"It's a magnificent gesture!" Morgan exclaimed. "But have you thought of this?—when they get you sworn you'll be no better off than any other honest man among them. And your oath in their lodge will hamper you completely as a witness against any one of them in court."

"It isn't possible I could ever become a very important witness regarding an event which occurred before I'd even heard of the Lynx

chapter of Riverford," the lawyer replied. "It is rather my expectation to find out on the inside which ones are the witnesses needed in court. Then I believe I can figure out how to enable them to talk."

AT NOON he was in Parker's office. No patients of the doctor's were in evidence, perhaps a sign of the already spreading mistrust of those who had guided the fortunes of the troubled lodge. And in the greeting of Parker there was now a larger friendliness and an undisguised sincerity and need. It was as if he recognized his own weakness, and perceived Wickford's strength. His hands were moist; he appeared limp; and the excess of dignity, the self-assertiveness and oracular mien had vanished away in these twenty trying hours.

The doctor and chapter head admitted that their special meeting of the night before had been a barren and unpleasant one. If a murderer or the proofs of a murder lurked among them, the debate lasting four hours and a half had produced not even the shadow of a disclosure.

When Wickford requested it, Gillen and Raines and Probst and Hanlon were quickly summoned. And then to the five responsible officers of the order the noted lawyer explained his desire to be initiated by them immediately.

The novelty of it, blending with audacity, left them all, even Gillen, momentarily speechless. Wickford felt a faint disgust. It seemed no set of human faces had ever come before him with a more repellent portrayal of discomposure and inherent stupidity. His stratagem appeared hardly to be within their grasp.

"Of course, you mean to help us——" Gillen began.

"But—but it's absolutely contrary to the by-laws," said Raines with a certain horror. "In two weeks' time——"

"In two weeks' time," Wickford retorted, "your chapter will have disbanded in disgrace, and some of you will be battling with a highly constitutional charge of homicide."

Parker was first to yield.

"I favor putting ourselves in Mr. Wickford's hands. He is famous for his methods in criminal cases, and he is certainly unprejudiced in this one," said he.

"I'm at least easier to deal with than Thomas," Wickford observed. "He will seek the guilty. I am mainly concerned with protecting the innocent."

No doubt they had been worrying about Thomas's well-known aspirations. Raines and Hanlon now gracelessly flopped over to an agreement with the doctor.

Probst still wrestled with the proposition as an expert in fraternalism who must try to recall a precedent. Gillen smilingly, if not heartily, swung about to be with the majority.

"Your help and advice are immensely valuable," he said. "And if you believe this can do any good, by all means let's find a way to accomplish what you wish. But I'm afraid, old man, you're simply inviting yourself into a mess. We saw at the meeting last night—and a sorry, haggard bunch we were by the time it ended—that we are in for it. Somebody has put something over. We members of the Lynx will simply have to stand the gaff together."

"Nonsense," said Wickford, so buoyantly that even Parker brightened. "Denmar was killed by a clever and desperate person, a man presumably, who had good reason to wish him dead. When Denmar's past is traced—the years before he

came to live in Riverford—there will be something in it to show us the one who had the homicidal motive. It never fails."

"Never?" said Gillen. "There are a good many unsolved killings—one notorious one right in this State."

"If we knew about his missing wife," Raines ventured. "His remembering her in his will——"

"He told several of us," Gillen interrupted, "that he believed she had died in—in South America, I think it was."

Parker interrupted to promote the initiation of Wickford as soon as possible. And after much orthodox objection from Raines and the veteran Probst, it was decided to lose no time while Gilbert Thomas withheld his hand, but to accept the lawyer into their chapter that very evening.

WICKFORD returned to New York and spent a hurried afternoon at his office, attending to a variety of matters he had neglected through the course of two days. Hopkinson he had asked to assist him in developing an account of Charles Denmar's career before he came East. Edna Denmar had mentioned a half-dozen places in the West where she and her father had lived from her earliest recollection until that day not many months ago when he had abruptly proclaimed that prosperity awaited them in Riverford.

The insurance man had sent inquiries to his company's agents in these distant towns; but at six o'clock there were still no replies, and Wickford asked to have any that did come in before eight telephoned out to him *via* Marshall Morgan at the *Times-Union* office.

At 7:15 the lawyer was arriving in Riverford for the second time that day. Hawley and Morgan were waiting for him. They had nothing new to report, save that the redoubtable Thomas was bestirring himself as prosecutor. The immunity of the Lynx would certainly expire on the morrow. Hawley was anxious. And yet, like Hopkinson in New York, the detective and Morgan had reached the dubious conclusion that Wickford, by joining the fraternal order suspected, would be placing himself at the mercy of Denmar's slayer.

"If I am, I'll at least identify him," said the lawyer, and declined to be dissuaded from his course.

He asked to examine the garments worn by Denmar on the night of his death. Hawley had taken over from Parker all such exhibits, and Wickford was enabled to inspect every article worn or carried by the murdered man when he had entered the chapter rooms of the Lynx for his initiation. These rooms were not too expensively located over a florist's shop on Mount Street. And very promptly at 8:20 Wickford was himself drawing near to that fraternal abode.

He had talked briefly and earnestly with Hawley and the editor before leaving them. They had promised not to follow him. But certain suggestions of his the county detective had cheerfully accepted as commands.

IT WAS now half-past eight. The florist's was closed, and in lieu of a watchman a great black cat with shining eyes perched sedately in the window between two potted ferns. A tall and rather stealthy stranger detached himself from neighboring shadows, walked past the newcomer twice, and then, turning back, addressed him curtly.

"You're the chosen one?" he said. "You are ready? You consent to follow me?"

He did not wait for any answer to these inquiries; indeed, his voice conveyed a kind of breathless uncertainty. He led up the stairs adjoining the entrance to the florist's, and De Witt Wickford, now committed to the rôle of initiate, followed closely after him.

They arrived in a small antechamber or hall, very dimly illuminated and offering a sample of that imperfect ventilation to be expected within.

"Stand here," said the stranger. "Be warned, and be composed. I now must leave you. Count to one hundred slowly, then knock thrice. You will not be unanswered."

Wickford was alone. He counted methodically, and then knocked three times on the door which his guide had indicated. He was aware that the other had disappeared by another and smaller door back of him; but he was playing the game and did not glance around.

His own three knocks were at once heavily repeated, and the main portal opened to him. Hanlon he could recognize despite his ornate robes of office. And it was Hanlon's voice which pronounced with a slight quaver: "You have been recognized. Do you come prepared?"

"I do," said Wickford.

"It is well. You are bidden to enter here. Come!"

And once more Wickford obeyed.

CHAPTER V

ON BENDED KNEE

THE principal meeting room of the chapter was a fairly large one, simple in its decorations and furnishings, with one large table and a smaller stand for the presiding officer, many folding chairs and a few armchairs, a rather too-vivid oil painting of a lynx, and two big American flags.

There were about twenty-five men in attendance when Wickford entered. They all stood up; and Parker, Raines, and Gillen, whose attire was particularly resplendent, came forward to receive the new member. After which the lawyer was introduced to the few among those present whom he had not already met, including the tall and diffident Leroy, who had been his guide from the street below. He shook hands with Probst and with Hanlon and the rest whom he remembered Gillen's presenting to him the afternoon before. And it embarrassed him to find most of them so respectful and ingratiating.

HE STOOD waiting for the ceremonial to be started. Parker presumably would make one more address. But there seemed an undercurrent of confusion. It suddenly occurred to Wickford that they had already departed from the routine of their initiation on his account, and were now at a loss to reconstruct the broken ritual.

"Gentlemen," he ventured, "though I have forced myself upon you, and therefore set myself apart, I wish to be treated now as any usual newcomer. I advocated this strange measure as a means of helping you and saving your organization in a peculiar crisis. If any among you resent my intrusion, I can only apologize for a good intention and hope there will also be some good result to mitigate your perhaps justifiable antagonism."

Probst, who was the parliamentarian, straightway proposed a rising vote of confidence. Gillen and Raines seconded his motion. The subsequent expression was unanimous, and Wickford was glad to note that a good deal of the tension relaxed.

He was given a plain black vestment like a college senior's gown.

He was asked to remove his shoes and given a heavy pair of wool socks to draw over his own hose. Then he knelt, and Parker sonorously administered an elaborate oath of fidelity, fraternity, and secrecy. This was the first degree.

"And now repeat after me," said Gillen, replacing the doctor. "If I tell——"

"If I tell——" Wickford followed him.

"May my left arm be cut off above the elbow——"

Wickford repeated it.

"——and may my eyeballs be pierced to the centre with a three-edged blade—and may I be dashed to pieces upon the rocks beside the everlasting sea. Amen."

Wickford completed his endorsement of the informer's fate in the same even tones employed by Gillen.

There was now another round of hand-shaking.

"You wish to go through with the second degree?" said Parker. "Yes—of course. You must see the inner room. But it is our custom to wait always until nineteen minutes past nine before proceeding to that. Though if for any reason you prefer a change——"

"On the contrary," Wickford assured him, "I wish it to be timed and conducted exactly as in Denmar's case. That is imperative."

"I see," said Parker, but it appeared to trouble him. And he sat apart in his handsome robes of white and blue and gold, a very portrait of imperial apprehension.

Gillen and Probst and Raines were arguing some detail of fraternal procedure seemingly remote from the death of Denmar or Wickford's present venture. But the others, in groups of three and four, were uniformly debating the probabilities of a homicide in the room not ten feet from where they waited.

Wickford passed from one to another of these groups. Now that he had been initiated in part, the others showed much less constraint in talking to him about Denmar than in any previous interview with the rank and file of the chapter. He found them all sincerely mystified. But none now disputed the possibility of a murderer's lurking among them. Wickford wondered if there were not many weapons of defense concealed beneath the silk robes.

PARKER abandoned his reverie, rapped for order, and announced that it was 9:18.

The members began a melodious chant. Hanlon opened a door which was directly beneath one of the flags, and Raines and Probst escorted Wickford into the inner chamber, where Charles Denmar had received his mortal blow. It was a room perhaps twelve feet by fifteen. There were the two small and curtained windows which Gillen had described. The walls were bare. On the floor was a thick blue rug. There were no chairs, no tables, no movable furniture whatever. The only incongruous article in view was a small ice-water cooler attached to a bracket in a little alcove, the least conspicuous spot in the room.

Prominently placed between the windows there was a small dais or platform—the fraternal altar—with three silver-painted pillars describing a triangle upon it. The center pillar, at the apex of this triangle, was about four feet high, the two others being nearly a foot shorter. And on this taller central pillar a white lamp gleamed, with a red lamp on the pillar at its left and a blue lamp at its right.

Wickford's inventory was an optical fear. Almost immediately he

was asked to kneel before the dais, directly in front of the pillar with the red lamp. He was told to bow his head in meditation.

"Might I ask one question?" he said.

"Why—yes," Raines consented.

"You both could swear that this room was precisely like this, in every detail, when you escorted Charles Denmar into it five nights ago?"

"There has been no change," said Probst.

"None that I can see," said Raines.

And then they left him alone, kneeling, his back to the door.

Wickford remained in his humble posture, but he reached out and tested the pillars and the lamps in turn. They were not to be moved, the lamps firmly fastened atop the pillars and each of these bolted to the dais. He had not thought it likely any such article had been the murderer's impromptu weapon, but he must not omit any point of the investigation for which he was virtually risking his life.

The door was a heavy one, sound proof, well-oiled, and noiseless. This he had noted on entering. He must remain kneeling, head bowed, his back to the door; he could not hear it open. But presently a slight draft warned him that it had been opened and closed again. He was no longer alone.

"REMAIN as you are, Brother Wickford."

The newcomer was Parker. He cleared his throat nervously. He went to the alcove and Wickford heard him getting himself a drink of ice water. Then he came and stood back of the initiate.

"My brother—you who are among those aspiring——" he began. Then he coughed; confusion, panic, or a curious embarrassment seemed to afflict this man, who must formerly have relished all these mystic episodes. "Under the circumstances, with so much of our dignity impaired," said he in a less rhetorical tone, "I think I'll take the private liberty of giving you just the substance of the message I'm supposed to impart."

Wickford did not rise or change his position or even lift his head, but he issued an arbitrary command.

"Proceed," he said, "exactly as you did in Denmar's initiation. Do not shorten it by a minute. I must insist——"

"Then you're making progress? You have proofs of actual guilt—one of us?" Parker whispered.

"Proceed according to schedule, please, Doctor. I have learned a great deal since you so kindly admitted me," the lawyer said. "Be patient and I'll get you proofs."

Parker's heavy sigh mingled relief with other emotions. But he gathered himself for an effort, and spoke eloquently for ten minutes upon many lofty matters unrelated to evidence of homicide. Then he told Wickford to kneel before the pillar bearing the blue lamp. He withdrew.

An interval of two minutes, and the lawyer's unaccustomed knees were already registering their protest. Then again came the whiff of faintly fanned air into the oppressively close chamber—another had entered to offer him guidance.

It was Hanlon, and he spoke for three minutes. Raines and Probst and Gillen followed in rapid order, each addressing him briefly, each remaining unseen. And it was Gillen who finally directed him to place himself before the central white lamp, when he had knelt twice be-

fore each of the other two lighted pillars.

Wickford did so, glad to relieve even momentarily his cramped position.

"Reflect upon all that has gone before," Gillen admonished.

A switch clicked, and the overhead lights went out. The pillar lamps glowed brightly; yet the room was shrouded and gloomy a yard beyond the dais. And Gillen had fanned him with the noiseless door. Once more he knelt and waited alone.

Wickford ventured to lean far forward, to see his wrist-watch by the light of the central white lamp, a symbol of integrity and virtue. It was 9:56.

Another entrance after an interval—Parker's voice, still hoarse, still nervous—a florid little speech upon elevated themes which would have been more inspirational if not already touched upon from several different angles, and again the speaker softly withdrew. It was 10:05.

For many reasons, but chiefly because of the inadequate elocution of the initiators, barring Gillen, the ceremony had become second-rate and tiresome. It would have bored any sophisticated man. Yet De Witt Wickford, cosmopolitan, adventurer, student, and genius, was not bored. He was warm, and he was eager. At 10:08 he ceased to humble himself, but rose quickly and groped his way to the alcove and the ice cooler. He raised the lid and plunged his hand and wrist into the cold water.

Then he carefully replaced the lid and with one hand cool and dripping he moved across the room to stand by the door, pressing closely against the wall, his back resting against the light switch.

The door opened without a sound and a man in a shining white robe came in. No Wickford knelt before the crude little altar, and the newcomer hesitated. It would be a moment before his eyes accustomed themselves to the poor radiance of the three symbolical lamps. The door swung slowly shut, and Wickford pressed the switch, lighting up the room with a suddenness that startled the other.

It was Gillen.

"What—what's the matter, old man?" he queried. "Get tired of bending the knee? Well, it's only a matter of minutes now. Let's get on with it——"

His gesture signified that the overhead lights must go out again.

"Yes, only a matter of minutes, Gillen," said the very original initiate. "It is now"—he glanced at his watch—"precisely eleven minutes past ten. You have just come in. And tell me, why did you kill Charles Denmar?"

CHAPTER VI

GILLEN'S PLEA

GILLEN'S face, never florid, now paled to a ghastly blue-white. He might have been a ghost in an overly ornate winding-sheet. And when he faced his bland accuser and tried to laugh, the mirth in him was deathly, too.

"So—so you've thought it over, or tossed up—and I'm elected to be scapegoat?" he said.

"It is now," said Wickford, "twelve minutes past ten. We are on schedule with the second degree as Alert Companion of the Lynx. You have been in this room nearly two minutes. Denmar's watch, which stopped from the impact of his fall after you struck him down, Gillen, stands at ten-thirteen, less twelve seconds. I merely had to

know which one of you would be alone with the candidate at forty-eight seconds past ten-twelve."

Gillen started a brisk retort, but his lips were dry, and he moistened them nervously with his tongue.

"A pretty flimsy coincidence," said he.

"Get yourself a drink of cold water, Gillen," the lawyer advised. "I've already seen to it that there are no lumps of ice in the cooler large enough to use against me—a mysterious and conveniently vanishing blunt instrument, eh?"

Gillen turned quickly away, and Wickford congratulated himself upon an exceedingly happy guess. The other went to the water cooler, fumbled with the insanitary aluminum cup in use there, and obtained a drink only after nervously splashing his fine silk robe in several places.

"I thought, Wickford, you'd find a way to pick on me. It had to be Parker or me, and the doc has kowtowed to you and bootlicked everybody to a fare-you-well since yesterday noon. So I was almost certain to get the call." The water had refreshed him, and he came back to stand close to the lawyer, and between him and the door. "However, there's the little matter of motive. I'm an organizer, yes. It's my job to rake in the saps. Denmar was another one to me, that's all. I didn't find him congenial and hardly knew him at all, outside of this fraternal connection."

"That you'll have to prove, I think," Wickford retorted. "Miss Edna Denmar, daughter of your victim, has shown me a photograph of her mother." Gillen looked away uneasily, and Wickford continued: "Despite the natural differences of seventeen years, I could see that Miss Denmar's mother, whose history I know in part, and the lady you presented to me as Mrs. Gillen, are one and the same."

"IF YOU try dragging my wife into this, there *will* be murder!" Gillen snarled.

He was flushed now, and a demon of fury danced in his eyes. He was ready to attack, but he did not clench his fists. A bad sign—it meant that he was armed.

"Mrs. Gillen was charming to me," said Wickford. "I should regret besmirching her in any degree. But you, Gillen, yourself deliberately dragged her in—when you planned and perpetrated this murder—the murder of the very man from whom you stole her away years ago."

And now the other lost control of himself; the clever, persuasive good fellow, the man's man and social organizer, vanished. Instead, a murderer confronted the cool accuser, the lust to kill distorting his face. With incredible quickness he brought a revolver from beneath his vestments, a weapon of light calibre, yet deadly enough at such range.

"Now—curse you!" he raged.

"Insanity will not save you or spare your wife anything!" Wickford exclaimed. An arresting phrase made the murderous impulse in the man before him weaker. "Kill me and make your conviction an open and shut case," the lawyer pursued. "Whereas, regarding Denmar, there may be many extenuating circumstances, many things I haven't even guessed at——"

"Yes. Yes—there are many—of course there are."

The hand which had threatened with the revolver now dropped limp at Gillen's side. He was grasping anxiously at the straw of equivocation that a legal mind held out to him.

"Well—name some," said Wickford.

"I admit that I have had to shield another——"

"That's hardly in a class with the invention you have displayed in conceiving your plot."

"I—I haven't time to try to explain. But let me go, won't you?" Gillen begged. "Have pity, for God's sake, Wickford! Denmar was nothing to you, and if you knew all the circumstances—— Give me a day's start! I'll not be heard of ever again, and eventually the thing will be forgotten. Innocent people will escape a muck of notoriety——"

"You'd leave the chapter holding the bag?"

"But you should worry!" Gillen urged. "You were not even a member when Denmar died."

"And the others, your loyal associates?"

"Sheep. They can get along. They'll be no worse off than if I'm brought to trial." He was trembling with eagerness, impressed with the belief that he was convincing this man who held him in the hollow of his hand.

"Your obvious guilt will descend to them," Wickford replied. "They will have to decide what to do——"

"They're all sworn, so are you."

"When the entire lodge is detained as material witnesses, they'll pass a resolution annulling our oath. And I am bound now to present my case to them."

THE revolver flashed up.

"You crafty devil, you——"

Wickford had been watching his adversary's eyes like a fencer, and he sensed the fresh attack almost in that moment of Gillen's mad decision to shoot him.

He flung himself aside and was falling as the pistol cracked. When he sprawled upon the blue rug there was a dark furrow on his cheek; but the bullet, undeflected, had buried itself in the wall beside the water cooler.

Gillen could have emptied his gun before the door was thrust open. But instead he stood in shivering horror, and it seemed that he also counted it a lucky escape.

Led by Parker, Hanlon, and the tall Leroy, a dozen members crowded into the room. Leroy snatched the weapon even as Hanlon grabbed Gillen's arm. Parker, like a man in a dream, bent down in his hampering costume to attend to Wickford's hurt.

"Only a scratch," said the lawyer, sitting up. "And it perhaps spares me a long argument by way of convincing you that James Gillen is capable of murder."

Parker's hand shook as he tried to bathe Wickford's wound. But now two others assisted him. And a handkerchief was employed as a temporary bandage.

"I knew it had to be you," Parker said to Gillen, who stood as a terribly interested spectator between Leroy and another big man named Cole, a deputy sheriff.

"And I knew that you'd use your authority and influence to protect me, Parker," Gillen retorted. "I counted on that—the desire of you and the others to whitewash any event in the chapter hall. Incidentally," he said, "don't forget, we are all solemnly sworn to reveal nothing that transpires within these precincts of fraternal love."

"Sneering's going to do you no good," said one of his captors. "Keep your mouth shut!"

Wickford, risen to his feet, took charge as they appeared to expect that he would. Said he: "Even those persons who jeer at secret orders and fraternalism are not inclined to regard an oath lightly. And

all legal procedure is based upon sworn statements and an abhorrence of perjury. Therefore, we as members of this order have to decide how our case shall be presented. It will be a grave thing to allow this man to go free. And a difficult thing to convict him in court with our testimony."

"It was about time somebody saw that," said Gillen.

"Shut up!" several warned him. For the members of the Lynx felt betrayed and undone, and were in no gentle mood.

Then the crowded doorway was cleared, and they all, with the bandaged Wickford and the sullen prisoner, gathered in the principal meeting room, where a kind of informal trial was undertaken.

FIRST the lawyer outlined such evidence as he had collected to establish a case against the accused. He said that he believed Denmar's skull had been crushed by a terrific blow with a lump of ice, taken from the cooler and returned to it immediately after the deed, where it had conveniently melted away. He told them about the watch, and he described his supposition respecting a motive. It took three of them to silence Gillen when he came to the delicate matter of Denmar's runaway wife.

"This killing was planned and timed with expert thoroughness," he concluded. "If you stop to consider, I'm certain many of you will recall some proof of this preparation. It was Gillen who urged Denmar upon you, wasn't it?"

"Yes," they agreed.

"And Gillen," said Raines, "suggested putting that ice water cooler in there. He said his speeches and Parker's were so long, he must have a drink handy, and it would be crude to have a pitcher and glass sitting on the floor."

"Gillen, too," added Parker, "proposed to me that we change the ritual so that one man at a time might take our second degree. Previously we had initiated classes of four or more. And he practically dictated the procedure in the second degree, the length of the speeches, the intervals between, and the order in which we attended the initiate. You remember, don't you," he added, to Wickford, "that Gillen said that 'poor old Denmar' was not alone in that room 'more than eight minutes'?"

"Keep on, and make me out a professional gunman," Gillen taunted them.

Some threatened him, and he grinned at them. He was a different man now from the beaten wretch who had pleaded with Wickford for a day's start. Obviously he held his Riverford colleagues in high contempt, and he would not knuckle to any or all of them. Looking at him as he denied his plight, Wickford could comprehend the spirit in the slayer of Denmar that had set him to plotting his crime.

"If you've anything to say in your own behalf——" the lawyer invited.

"I HAVE plenty," said Gillen. "Denmar was a dirty blackmailer. He'd bled me for fifteen years off and on. And I stood it for my wife's sake." He paused, and his eyes scornfully swept the circle of faces—amazed and mediocre faces, gaping, stupid, supercilious, or shocked. Then he turned back to Wickford as the only one present worthy of his confidence. "My wife," he said, "was once Denmar's wife. And, by the way, his name wasn't Denmar, but Charles Denman Warbank. He was always a surly brute. His wife even as a

bride was unhappy. I came to their town, organizing another society. I was there four months. We met and fell in love. When I left, she went with me."

"And you composed the passages of our ritual in praise of virtue!" Parker put in.

Gillen coolly ignored him.

"She had to leave her little girl. But I promised her we'd get the child when we were settled and she'd secured a divorce, even if I had to do some kidnaping. However, Denmar pretended the child had died. And then he disappeared, changing his name, so that I doubt if, even to-day, Edna Denmar knows it isn't her real name," he explained. "In due time Mary secured her divorce and we were married. It was Denmar's whim to call her Marie—you noticed that in the will. She particularly detested it, for no special reason. She'd been christened Mary, and the Marie was just one of his many small ways of tormenting her.

"About a year after our marriage, I heard from him—and learned his new name. He had found a flaw, some technical error in Mary's divorce—she was still legally his wife. He began extorting money from me, knowing I'd not want her worried or hounded. He kept it up moderately until a year ago. Things must then have broken badly for him, or he suspected I had struck it rich. He wrote me saying he was coming to see me. I paid him, and I begged and threatened and bribed him till I was almost flat myself. Then, five months ago, he boldly moved to Riverford.

"Imagine how I was fixed," Gillen exclaimed. "I had to warn Mary, after hiding it all from her for years and paying the fellow thousands of dollars in that time. I said he was around, wanting to make trouble, disgrace us here, just when we seemed all set. She agreed not to go out much, to be careful with 'phone calls. I wanted her to go away on a long trip, but she wouldn't leave me. We've always stuck together since that day she left him for me.

"Then I learned he had a girl with him, his daughter. The child hadn't died. And I knew what that would mean to Mary. I was crazy with trying to think my way out. If Denmar had been decent, we might have patched up some sort of truce—let mother and daughter be united, straighten out the divorce snarl, and I'd have helped him to a good job. But he hated Mary for leaving him and me for taking her. And in seventeen years that hatred had not diminished, but had become a vengeful obsession.

"He lived on me here in the past months," Gillen concluded. "I knew he meant to try to see Mary, and meant to use the daughter in some fiendish way to hurt her. He said the girl wanted to be engaged to Marshall Morgan, and he'd have to do the right thing and use her real name. He knew Mary'd see something in the paper and would know her little girl had lived and grown up and was perhaps passing her by on the street every day.

"I had become so desperate, I think he got a bit afraid of me. He extorted from me the first premium on his life insurance policy. He suggested that I let him in on this 'graft' with the fraternal organization. He was getting around me like an octopus. I had no way to turn, no one to turn to. What could I do? Kill him! It was my only hope of relief.

"I planned it carefully. I worked out the whole scheme, timed to the minute, as only a Wickford would have discovered. Then I did knock

in his head with a chunk of ice. I murdered this blackmailer, this living curse. I'm glad I did. He got what was coming to him all along. And now what are you brothers going to do about it?"

His challenge rang through the room as no solemn ritual ever had. There was a prolonged, deathly pause.

"You intend to plead insanity?" Wickford asked.

"One moment," said Parker, presiding. "We must first dissolve this chapter. It is the parent one of the Lynx order. We can reorganize later under a new name."

"Try being an order of Roast Goose," Gillen dared to jeer.

"By dissolving," Parker firmly pursued, "we will annul our fraternal oaths. We can then vindicate ourselves in a body by testifying to the facts in this case."

WICKFORD, like Gillen, had been studying faces. And he saw little or no pity anywhere for this killer who had evidently endured great provocation. Gillen had made a mock of their clan and their sworn secrets; he was mocking them still. He had exploited them, while himself being bled. And he had abominably imposed upon their trust and the shelter of their comradeship.

"I won't come to trial," Gillen said. "I know what a hick jury would do to me. I can read the verdict right here in this room." A final thrust! "I've been tried by my peers. I have been found guilty. Let me pass sentence on myself. No reason to make it any worse for Mary, or that girl who's had to live with Denmar all these years. Just let me have a revolver and one cartridge. I'll go into that inner room, and the case of Gillen versus Denmar will end where it began."

CHAPTER VII

EDNA FINDS A HOME

THEY argued it long and vehemently, but in the end—Wickford consenting—Gillen had his way with them, as he had always had before when he chose to use persuasion. It was Cole, the deputy sheriff, who supplied a .38 automatic, after removing all but one cartridge.

Gillen accepted the weapon and let it lie in the palm of his hand. In the room now there were many apprehensive glances. A desperate man—with one shot! Was there one among them he wished to slaughter before he could be overpowered again and dragged off to jail?

It might be Wickford—his Nemesis, indeed. But the lawyer sat between Parker and Hanlon with perfect composure, indifferent to the tension, if not to the drama he was witnessing. Gillen stood now in the doorway of the inner chamber. He must go into that room, where he had killed Denmar, where he had lately been trapped—and then?

"Good-by, all," he said. "You boys had better beat it, then you can say I did this to myself after the meeting, when alone and closing up the joint. See?" He paused and surveyed them whimsically, but not unkindly. "Try to forget all the nasty things I've said. You were all good scouts, and in earnest. This lodge will grow big and its branches will flourish."

He turned on his heel and entered the inner room alone.

There were gasps and muttered interjections.

"We can't let him do this. Stop him!" somebody exclaimed.

BUT none moved toward the heavy and noiseless door. A minute passed, and another — three — four.

Wickford studied his watch, the only calm man in view.

Then—a muffled report!

"By God, he has done it!" Parker exclaimed. "I must—I must name a committee. Eh, Wickford? Won't that be the fitting thing, under these conditions?"

"I believe there are no precedents, Doctor," the lawyer answered dryly.

So Parker appointed Hanlon, Cole, and Raines as a committee—"to investigate that muffled explosive sound."

The three went out officiously to find the suicide. They came back straightway, aghast. For Gillen had gone.

"Here's my gun," said Cole. "He just fired into the water-cooler. He'd pried up a window. He squeezed through and has got away."

Opinion was divided as to the ultimate blessing of this subterfuge. If Gillen were never caught——

"I think he will be," Wickford said. "I anticipated the killer's attempted flight before I was sure it was Gillen. I spoke to County Detective Hawley. He said he'd have some State police in here, just in case of emergency."

"Gillen'll be too slick for 'em," a belated admirer boasted.

"In the dark, if he avoids main streets, he ought to be able to slip away," another agreed.

There was an eager casting aside of vestments. Every one wished to hurry away, to hear or to tell what had transpired that night. Cole, one of the first three to go, returned in a moment breathlessly. He said he had heard, some distance off, three shots in quick succession.

NEXT day De Witt Wickford lunched again with Hopkinson in a New York hotel. He ate with relish, but yet slowly and carefully, one side of his face being stiff and sore from the wound and the dressing and plaster upon it.

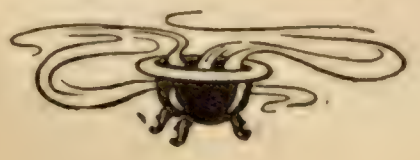
"And he could have made his getaway," he was saying of Gillen, "but he had to go to her and say goodby. They have been a very devoted pair. Gillen loved her very dearly. It costs him his freedom, and probably his life."

"He is dying?"

"They say so. The State troopers shot him when he resisted. I had told Hawley to have Gillen's house covered. Even if an accomplice was the actual killer, I knew Gillen and his wife were in it deeply, because I'd identified her as Denmar's former wife."

"And what about the Denmar girl?" inquired the insurance man.

"She finds a mother by losing a father. I hope she'll marry Morgan—a lively, likable chap. He means to leave Riverford—has a much better offer to run a larger paper in Pennsylvania," Wickford said. "And I think all three of them may eventually be happy there, in spite of this cloud upon their lives."



He shouted hoarsely; they could hear him splashing vainly.

Treaty Money

By LESLIE McFARLANE

There is a tradition that the Northwest Mounted Police "always get their man," but the records show that not a few of this dauntless band have succumbed to the hardships and dangers which are part of their daily routine. In this story the author graphically describes the terrifying experiences of a "Mountie" who found himself face to face with death, and worse than death—disgrace.

THIS story was told me by Bob Donaldson when that young man stopped over one gusty night at my cabin on Tuesday River. He was heading north at the time, after some miserable redskin who had filled full of lead a whisky trader who had thoroughly deserved a violent end. Donaldson had already traveled five days in wicked November weather.

These Mounties! What a life! Out in wind and rain and snow, on long trails and winding rivers, struggling across swamps and muskegs, sleeping under the stars. Lonely men, and good fellows all. God knows what they see in such an existence, but they seem to like it and thrive on it. Me, I'd rather have my cabin and a good fire. Perhaps it's because I'm getting old. Donaldson and his kind—well, they're young; not always in point of years, but youth is in the heart. Yes, they're young.

Donaldson is a sergeant now, but at the time of this tale he was only a constable, on his way to Fort McCrea with a bag full of treaty money for the Indians. A routine job that didn't promise excitement. There was an outlaw loose up around Papoose Lake at the time, and Donaldson had counted on the assignment, which seemed to promise a thrill or two; but instead they had given him this bag of money and sent him on his way to the fort. Another young chap was ordered after the outlaw, and he got caught in a forest fire and was burned to a crisp, so perhaps it was just as well for Donaldson. Just the same, he didn't think so at the time, and he grouched to himself half-way down the river.

HE DIDN'T meet any one until the evening of the second day of his journey, when he picked up a fellow called Karoski, a big, swarthy, good-looking man with a sort of slithery smile. Karoski was sitting out on a rocky point, sucking a dry pipe, with a pack-sack beside him.

"What happened?" asked Donaldson.

"My canoe upset farther up the river," said Karoski, with that smile of his that nobody liked. "I've been walking since."

"Better come with me," says Donaldson. "How far are you going?"

"Just up to Whitten's place."

Now, Donaldson had never been this far down the river before, but he had heard of Whitten, a rascally little devil of an independent trader who was always teetering on the brink of hot water and never quite getting into it. Donaldson hadn't planned to stop there, for he didn't like placing himself under obligations, particularly to men of Whitten's type, but now, you see, there was nothing else he could do. In common decency, he couldn't bring Karoski to the trading post and go right on.

Donaldson wasn't particularly friendly. He had heard of this Karoski before and knew him for a river gambler and generally shady character. Still, if even the devil himself had tipped out of his canoe, you couldn't leave him sitting on the shore. So Karoski helped him over the portage, and below the rapids they got into the canoe and started down river again, Karoski doing his share of the paddling and Donaldson resolving to keep a sharp eye on the leather bag in which he had the treaty money for the Indians.

This money amounted to over two thousand dollars, and some of it was in bills, some in gold, some in silver. It was a good, hefty parcel in its waterproof packet. The object of his journey had been kept quiet enough. Not even the Indian agent at Fort McCrea knew how and when the treaty money would arrive, and Donaldson was fairly confident that he would make the grade without any trouble, but still —you never know.

Karoski chatted about this, that, and the other thing while they paddled, and Donaldson kept a close tongue in his head, although he was agreeable enough, and before long they came in sight of Whitten's place. It was a log house at the top of a slope, and there was a rickety landing at the water's edge. It was just about twilight when they got there, and the huskies set up a terrific yowling when the canoe came in sight around the bend.

AS THEY came near the landing they saw Whitten hurrying down the path. He was a little fellow, this trader, small and slouchy and dried-up, looking about ten years older than he really was. When a

man lives away out in the back country and knocks off more than his fair share of hard liquor it doesn't take long to show on him. He was followed by the biggest half-breed that Donaldson had ever seen.

A monster, that breed! He was a big, ugly, stupid giant, standing about six foot three in his moccasins, and he had the stooping shoulders of very big men, as though his weight were too much for him. His eyes were like little slits of ink, and he had a sleepy, surly expression as he shambled along behind Whitten, who looked like a skinny little boy in comparison. When Whitten reached the landing he waved to the pair in the canoe, then stood there waiting. The breed stood behind him, as Donaldson said later, like a huge, clumsy statue.

But he didn't look at the big breed very long. A movement in the doorway of the house at the top of the slope caught his eye, and there, of all things, he saw a girl. Not a squaw, not a faded old woman, but a girl—a white girl.

"I didn't know Whitten was married," he murmured to Karoski.

Karoski looked back at him with that slithery smile again.

"It's his stepdaughter. That's who I was coming to see."

It wasn't so much what he said, but the way he put it. Just as much as to say: "Keep away. I saw her first." As if he had an option on her.

Well, even if Karoski was courting the girl, there was no law against looking at her, and Donaldson was young enough to take an interest in a pretty face—particularly in that part of the world, where pretty faces average about one to the thousand square miles, if your ideas of beauty aren't too strict. It was just about dusk, as I said, and he couldn't see her features very well, but there was something about the way she stood in the doorway that gripped his imagination. She didn't move. She just stood there and looked down at the canoe gliding in toward the landing, and then she looked away off up the river to where it disappeared around the bend. Donaldson, who is a poetic chap for a Mountie, told me that when he saw her "she seemed to express the tragedy of all lonely women who dwell in the far places of the world." I think I get what he meant.

Anyway, he and Karoski got out of the canoe, and he was introduced to Whitten. The trader made a big fuss over Karoski, but he made a bigger fuss over Donaldson. He was one of those lickspittle Englishmen who aren't comfortable unless they are kowtowing to somebody, and he pawed over Donaldson and made out that he was so delighted to have the honor of putting him up overnight that you'd think he'd been waiting at this lonely trading post all these years just for the privilege.

"You can't imagine how pleased I am," he would say, capering about and rubbing his hands. "I hadn't expected any such good fortune. We all owe so much to the Mounted Police. It's an honor to have you as our guest. An honor, indeed!"

He made the big half-breed carry Donaldson's pack up to the house, but when the plug-ugly made to pick up the bag with the treaty money Donaldson grabbed it.

"I'll carry this myself," he said, and the half-breed grunted and shambled away.

At the time Donaldson thought he saw Karoski and Whitten glance at each other, but he didn't think anything of it. Perhaps they were just a bit puzzled. However, Whitten began chattering again, and they went

up the slope. The girl was still standing in the doorway.

"It's a pleasure to have you call on us, gentlemen," Whitten was saying earnestly. "We have few enough visitors in this lonely place as it is, the Lord knows. It's a real pleasure."

DONALDSON took off his hat as they approached the girl, but she merely looked at them with a superb indifference. She was about twenty years of age, he judged, and although her clothes were cheap and rough she somehow managed to wear them with an air, and she was scrupulously neat. You know, there are some girls who could look well-dressed in an old flour-sack, just as there are others who would manage to look dowdy in a Paris gown. Now, when Donaldson described her to me he began to rave a little and quoted considerable poetry, some of which I think he made up himself, so you must make allowances for exaggeration, but all in all she seems to have been a real pretty girl. Donaldson said she had the beauty of all wild, sad things, and he spouted rhapsodies about her unwavering, luminous eyes and her wistful red lips and how she seemed to ignore them all in her dreamy contemplation of the silent river.

"Mary, this is Constable Donaldson," said Whitten. "He and Mr. Karoski are going to stop over with us to-night." But she said nothing, merely nodded her head a little and moved aside to let them pass. But Karoski swept off his hat and smiled like a fox and took her hand.

"You are looking more beautiful than ever, Miss Mary." He rolled his eyes at her as if he were starting a flirtation with a waitress, but the girl just drew her hand away and said, "Oh, thank you!" with so much irony that it penetrated even Karoski's hide. Whitten affected not to notice, although he bit his lip and began to cackle about supper as they went into the house.

For a trader's house in that part of the world, it was a large building, two-storied. There was a big front room with a small office at one side, a dining-room and a kitchen, and bedrooms upstairs. This magnificence was unusual, and Donaldson was properly impressed, but Whitten informed him that the house had been built for his wife, now dead.

"She *would* insist on an upstairs, gentlemen," he said as he led them to their room. "Said she didn't feel civilized living in a house with only one floor—although the Lord knows she had lived—but perhaps that's why . . ."

He left the reflection unsaid and showed them into a room at the front of the house, overlooking the river.

"You don't mind sharing the same bed, I hope," he said. "It's the best I can do, you see. We have only one spare room."

Karoski spoke up and said he didn't mind at all. He would be just as well satisfied to sleep on the floor, for that matter. A bed of any kind was a luxury to him. As long as he had a roof over his head, he didn't care. And Donaldson, although he didn't quite like the idea of sharing any room with this Karoski, couldn't do anything else but say that it was quite all right with him. But he resolved to keep his eyes open just the same.

NOW Karoski had salvaged his pack-sack from the smashed canoe, and he produced a bottle of whisky. Whitten's face lighted up immediately and he hurried off for glasses, tremendously excited. When he came back, Donaldson, even at the risk of seeming impolite, refused to

drink with them. He still had his mind on that treaty money, so he told them he never touched liquor, and turned down his glass. Karoski tried to persuade him, but he stuck to his resolution, and Whitten—without many regrets, you may be sure—drank Donaldson's share and a couple of extra ones besides. You'd think the fellow hadn't seen a drink for years and was trying to make up for lost time. He was becoming quite talkative when the big half-breed appeared silently in the doorway and announced that supper was ready.

And that was a queer thing about the half-breed. For a man of his size, he moved about in a silence that was almost uncanny. Donaldson said it gave him a start when he turned around and saw the big fellow standing in the doorway. He had ascended the stairs like a ghost, and he might have been standing there for several minutes for all they knew; and when he turned and went away again he vanished without a sound. A creepy sort of devil, evidently.

Before they went into the dining-room, Donaldson asked the trader if there was a safe in the office, where he might put that precious sack, but Whitten shook his head.

"Haven't any need for one," he told Donaldson. "No thieves up in this wilderness. But it should be all right in your room. Is it very valuable?"

The way he put it, the question didn't seem prompted by curiosity. It was just a careless inquiry. Donaldson shook his head.

"Oh, no," he answered. "Just some papers and things that I shouldn't want to lose."

"It'll be all right in the room," put in Karoski, with his smile. "We should both be able to defend it if any bold, bad burglars clamber in the window. And I guess you can trust me, eh?"

So, rather than arouse suspicion, Donaldson put the treaty money in his pack, and they went down to eat. Whitten's daughter was already waiting for them, and the big half-breed served the meal, moving with no more noise than a cat in .and out of the kitchen, where a dumpy old squaw was bent over the cook-stove.

"I believe in having servants," Whitten told them, in explanation of all this folderol. "Keeps the Indians in their place. Makes 'em know the white man is top dog."

DONALDSON said it was the strangest meal he ever sat through. It wasn't so much that anything happened; it was just that one somehow expected something to happen any minute, only it never did. For no earthly reason at all, he got the idea of a heavy tension. On the surface it was all quite dull and correct; the food was excellent, Whitten kept chattering away on every topic under the sun, Karoski told how his canoe had upset, and Donaldson made polite comments once in a while; pots and pans clattered in the kitchen, the half-breed appeared and disappeared—all serene. But, in spite of everything, Donaldson could not escape that insane impression that almost any minute the placid film might break like a bubble, plunging everything into an unreasonable and inexplicable confusion. And he could not get rid of the idea that this weird atmosphere was created by the presence of the girl. She was the disturbing element. She ate in silence, but Donaldson was conscious of Karoski's eyes fairly eating her up even when he seemed most engrossed in Whitten's chatter. Donaldson saw, too, that the girl was fully aware of

the scrutiny and that she seldom looked up from her plate.

There was one incident that puzzled Donaldson and gave him something of a shock, the sort you get when you stumble on something you can't understand and that you think you shouldn't have seen. It concerned the half-breed. The big fellow was as silent and submissive as an ox, but Donaldson imagined that whenever he came near the girl she seemed to draw herself away. Once Donaldson looked up to see her gazing fixedly at the kitchen doorway, and when he glanced in that direction he noticed that the half-breed was standing there, silent and motionless, watching her without the slightest flicker of expression on his dark and sullen face. It lasted for only a second—Donaldson had just happened to intercept that brief, flashing exchange—and then the breed turned and slipped quietly off into the kitchen. When Donaldson glanced back at the girl, he saw a look in her eyes that could have been born of nothing else than sheer terror. Then it died, she looked down at her plate again, Whitten's interminable gabble went on, and the meal drew to its conclusion.

Afterward the trader brought Donaldson into his office under pretense of showing him some samples of gold ore that an Indian had brought in from the back country, but the young fellow could see that it was only an excuse to leave Karoski alone with the girl. They weren't alone long. In a few minutes Karoski came into the office with a face as red as an October maple, and Donaldson heard the door slam violently as the girl went out upon the veranda. Whitten looked up in a mild sort of bewilderment, seemed about to ask a question, then thought better of it and discreetly displayed another sample. Karoski slumped down in a chair and observed that it looked like rain, which it did not. He took a big drink, and Whitten took a bigger one. Donaldson turned down his glass again. No one said very much. The tension that hung over that strange household seemed suddenly to have increased. After a while Karoski and Whitten began to chat about this and that, although it was plain to be seen that their minds were on something else; so Donaldson remarked that he thought he would get a breath of fresh air, and made his way outside.

THERE was a moon that night. It was just rising over the hill, throwing silver onto the river. The girl was sitting in the shadow, and Donaldson could just see the dark outline of her figure and the pale oval of her face as she crouched in her chair by the railing.

"A beautiful view from here," he remarked.

To his surprise, the girl got up quickly and came over to him.

"It's better down by the landing," she said. "Come with me."

It wasn't an invitation; the way she put it made it a command. So Donaldson gulped down his astonishment and went with her. She led the way swiftly down the slope, walking with a nervous, graceful stride. He tried to make conversation, and when he remarked on the loneliness of her life it was as if he had touched a spring, for she wheeled about and said, almost savagely:

"It's hell! Just hell!"

Donaldson was vastly surprised by the outburst, but he wasn't shocked. He recognized that this was no profanity. Her tones were so bitter and intense that it seemed perfectly natural for her to use the one word that would express her meaning.

One could see that she wasn't the kind to use an expression like that in the casual sense. He looked at her curiously, but she turned away from him again and strode on toward the landing with her chin up and her hands clenched. There didn't seem to be anything for him to say.

From the landing the view was beautiful. They could see the whole expanse of the river from where it wound about the bend in the south, to where it disappeared in the deep shadows to the north, and the moonlight blazed across it like a shivering road—you know the way it does. The trees were like a great velvet wall with a ragged top against the clear sky, and the stars flared. It can be as lovely as that only in the north, but the girl merely gave it a quick, defiant look before she turned and said fiercely:

"I hate that."

She was facing him in the moonlight, and Donaldson said he had never seen any one so vividly beautiful. She seemed lit by an inner fire that was somehow softened by the radiance of the night. He fell in love with her right then and there, he said, if he hadn't already been in love with her from the moment he saw her, which I think was the case, although he didn't know it. And then, abruptly, she said to him:

"You are in danger here."

"In danger?"

"It's the money—the money you are carrying with you." She talked hurriedly and in a low tone, but every word was clear, for her voice was soft and distinct. "They know all about it." She gestured toward the house, where the light shone from the office window like a big yellow eye. "Karoski and my stepfather have planned to rob you. They knew you were coming down the river, and Karoski waited out there and told you that story about his canoe so you would be sure to stop here overnight."

"H'm!" Donaldson could only murmur in a perplexed sort of way. He saw the whole plot in an instant, but it knocked him off balance for a while. He had been suspicious of Karoski from the start, but still it hit him a tremendous thump to learn that there was a cut-and-dried scheme against him.

"Will you go away, please—tonight?" she said.

This brought him back to earth. He just laughed at her.

"I won't run," said Donaldson. "They won't get very far if they try to rob me. I'm much obliged to you, miss, but I'll just keep my eyes open, and if they start anything——" He patted the revolver at his waist. Ah, yes, a young fellow can be very fine and brave and scornful when there's a pretty girl as audience.

But she insisted.

"Please go away," she said. "You don't know them as I do. Karoski——" She clutched his sleeve suddenly, and he could feel her fingers tighten about his wrist. "My stepfather owes Karoski money. He is right under his thumb. He'll do anything for him. And Karoski is a devil. A devil, I tell you!"

"I won't run," said Donaldson stubbornly. Who would run, with a pretty girl watching? "I'll go out in the morning, just as I intended, but I won't sneak away in the night."

"IT WON'T be sneaking away," she told him. "I know you're not afraid. But it will be wiser. And, besides"—she hesitated and took a deep breath, as though she were going into icy water—"besides, I want you to take me with you."

Donaldson hadn't had any previous experience with beautiful girls who wanted him to run away with

them, so he didn't know just what to say; but while he was thinking up an appropriate remark to cover his astonishment she hurried on:

"You don't know the life I lead here! It's hateful—hateful—hateful!" she repeated. "Another month of it will kill me. If you don't take me away with you—take me away to Fort McCrea or some place where I can get away from those men—I'll run off by myself, into the bush, anywhere—I don't care. There's Karoski, always hanging around here, pawing me, flattering me. And my stepfather drunk half the time, telling me to be nice to Karoski, when I hate the beast! I loathe him! An then there is Pete!"

"Pete?"

"The half-breed. I'm not afraid of Karoski or my stepfather. I just hate them." She managed to convey everything of scornful contempt into the words. "But that savage—I'm afraid of him! Really afraid. He just watches me, watches me with those little black eyes of his, never saying a word, just watching me like an animal, and I don't know what's going on in that evil mind of his, but I'm afraid of it. Something is going to happen. It's hanging over me. I can feel it. Take me away before it is too late.

She was almost panting as she clung to his sleeve, and her eyes had such passionate desperation in them that Donaldson felt that he was looking into the depths of uttermost terror.

"Please!" she said. "We can't stay here talking. They'll notice. You'll take me with you?"

And, as though it were another man altogether, he heard himself saying mechanically: "Yes, I'll take you away."

And then he asked how Karoski and Whitten had planned to achieve this robbery. She didn't know. She had merely overheard part of a discussion, but it was not to have been a plain and simple theft. They were wise enough to know that you can't monkey with the Mounted Police that way. There had been something about the substitution of a duplicate package, but in any event Donaldson would have been disgraced and helpless.

"I'll keep Karoski talking downstairs when you go to your room," she said. "I've been planning it ever since you came. There's a tree outside your window. You can get down that way. Come right to the landing and wait by the canoe. I'll come as soon as I can get away. They won't notice until we're gone."

"Won't they follow?"

"I've slashed their canoes."

Donaldson almost whistled. Slashing a man's canoe is a high crime in the North, as you well know. It showed that the girl was desperately in earnest, and it showed that she must have been hard driven to do such a thing.

"I'll be here," he told her.

"You won't fail me?"

"I won't fail you."

THEN she turned away, and they walked back up the slope as though nothing had happened. Donaldson went into the house with a feeling that he was going to wake up in a little while and find that he had dreamed it all. When they went inside he managed to pass a few remarks about the scenery, and the girl carried it off marvelously. She seemed a different person altogether, for she had lapsed into her old quiet unconcern; and although Karoski and Whitten looked up at them a bit grumpily as they came in, neither had anything to say. Donaldson noticed that the bottle was more than half empty, and that while Whitten was becoming notice-

ably drunk, Karoski was as amiably inscrutable as ever.

The girl went into the dining-room and made a pretense at doing some sewing. Donaldson sat with Karoski and Whitten in the office for a while, although he could scarcely bring himself to be civil to either of them. Now that he knew what he knew, he could study the pair. It was clear that, as the girl had said, Whitten was absolutely under the other man's thumb. Karoski was the schemer, a man utterly without scruple, a suave, cruel rogue, and Whitten was no more than a besotted weakling, possessed of a facile cunning, a fellow whose character had been warped and twisted and undermined by liquor and by a wilderness that crushes the weak and invigorates the strong. Donaldson noticed that Karoski plied the older man with whisky; not directly, but merely by leaving the bottle within convenient reach, so that Whitten would automatically extend his arm once in a while, unsteadily slop the liquor into his glass, and gulp it down.

"It's only once in a blue moon he gets a chance for a decent jag," Karoski explained. "I don't blame him." And he smiled as though expecting approbation. The Mountie was puzzled. If Whitten were taking part in the projected robbery, it hardly seemed reasonable that Karoski should deliberately set about making him drunk. It occurred to Donaldson that there was a double deal in the air, and that perhaps Karoski planned to carry it off by himself, leaving the trader holding the bag. This, undoubtedly, was the solution. He began to have a sort of reluctant admiration for Karoski's craftiness.

He saw Karoski glance up suddenly in evident response to some signal from the other room, and when he followed the other man's gaze he saw the big half-breed standing just beyond the doorway, beckoning silently. The gambler growled an excuse and left the office. Donaldson heard him go out on the veranda with the breed. Karoski returned in a few minutes, sat down moodily in his chair, then got up again restlessly, made elaborate excuses, and betook himself into the living-room to talk to the girl.

Karoski had better luck this time, for through the doorway Donaldson could see that she was chatting with him pleasantly enough. A gasping snore drew his attention to Whitten, and he saw that the trader was asleep in his chair. He got up and went into the living-room, achieving a stifled yawn. He would go to bed, he told them. The girl gave him a lighted lamp, and Karoski, with a faint smile, said he would be up shortly.

WHEN Donaldson reached his room he looked out at the open window. He saw the tree, but he was not the sort of fellow to scramble down a tree. There's something undignified about it, eh? He dropped his pack to the ground, then got out the window and let himself go. It was only about twelve feet, and he landed silently in the soft earth. Then he stole around the corner of the house and went down the slope toward the landing, keeping in the shadow of the bushes all the way.

He put the pack in the bow of the canoe, and made the craft ready for a quick escape. He looked back at the house. The lower windows were still shining. Donaldson sat down in the shadow of the trees by the river.

If it hadn't been for the girl, he would never have tried to escape from the place this way. He would

have stayed and fought it out rather than sneak out like a kid running away from boarding school. But the girl complicated matters. She must have led a hideous existence in this lonely place. Well, he would get her away from Karoski and the breed and that wretched Whitten—I guess Donaldson grinned to himself when he thought of their consternation.

He had been there about ten minutes when suddenly he heard a scream. It cut through the lovely night like a sword, sharp and piercing. He sat up with a start.

The scream was not repeated. Donaldson looked back at the house. There it was, a gloomy mass, with the yellow eye of the office window looking ironically down at him. Everything was still again. The trees swayed, the river rippled in the moonlight. It was as if nothing had happened.

He started back toward the house at a run, then he stopped and went back to the canoe. Something had gone wrong, he knew, and that meant trouble. The girl had screamed, and the scream had been cut short. She must have been detected as she tried to escape. He would go back.

But his first duty was toward that treaty money, so he returned to the canoe, snatched the bundle out of the pack, and hid it underneath the bushes by the trail. There was no telling what might happen. Then he hurried toward the house.

DONALDSON was no fool, and he did not go tearing directly up the path. No, he kept to the shadows and went as silently as he could, for he realized that if they did not know he had left the house he still held the advantage.

He was almost at the clearing when something fell on his back like a ton of rock. Donaldson plunged forward on his face with a jolt that knocked the breath out of him, and he felt a knee in the small of his back, pinning him down as helpless as a baby. He put up a good fight, but he didn't have a chance. His arms were twisted behind him until he could have yelled with the pain; his own handcuffs were yanked out of his hip pocket, snapped onto his wrists in spite of all his frantic struggles; his revolver was taken from the holster, and then the attacker got up and dragged him to his feet.

It was the half-breed. He was taller than Donaldson by half a head, and although Donaldson is some husky youngster himself, this breed was a giant, and strong as a bull. It was just a case of brute strength and of being taken by surprise—and there was Donaldson, almost pop-eyed with astonishment and rage, with his own handcuffs on his wrists and this big breed holding him by the scruff of the neck. The big fellow just gave him a push toward the house and muttered: "Come on."

DONALDSON came on. He had to. It all happened so quickly that he didn't have time to collect his wits before he was shoved up onto the veranda and through the doorway into the office. And there he saw the girl, with Karoski holding her into a chair, and Whitten blinking stupidly at them from the other side of the room.

"Oh-ho! So you got him, eh?" said Karoski, when the half-breed brought Donaldson in. "Good work!"

The girl's eyes were big and terrified when she saw that Donaldson was handcuffed and without his gun. She gave a little cry, and Karoski turned to her.

"You can scream all you wish

now," he said. "Nobody will hear you—at least, nobody that counts."

Then Donaldson managed to find words. He felt like a fool for letting himself be trapped so easily, and now he raged and ranted. He was so angry that he told me later he didn't know what he said. But he warned them that nothing on earth would save them from jail if they didn't let him go at once. But Karoski only shook his head and tightened his lips.

"We're in deep enough as it is," he growled. "Might as well go the whole hog."

"Wha'sh goin' on here?" growled Whitten, sprawled in his chair.

Karoski didn't pay any attention to him, but he turned to the big breed, who was standing by Donaldson as though waiting for further orders, and told him to keep an eye on things for a few minutes. Then he went outside.

DONALDSON tried to stir Whitten up.

"I'm warning you," he told the trader. "You'll get jail for this, as sure as fate. No matter what happens to me, there'll be more Mounted Police up here, and they'll get you!"

But Whitten just shook his head in a foolish sort of way and burbled: "Gotta do—what—Karoski—says," and fell asleep again.

"It was Pete," said the girl dully. She gave the half-breed a look that should have shriveled him up. "He must have followed us to the landing and heard us, for he told Karoski. I couldn't get away. I screamed to warn you."

"The breed tackled me coming up the path."

The big fellow just stood there like a graven image, as though he didn't hear them, and he kept his eyes fixed steadily upon the girl. The drunken trader began to snore. After a while they heard Karoski on the veranda. He came into the room, showing his teeth in an ugly sort of snarl.

"Where's that money?" he said, going over to Donaldson.

"Try and find it!"

Without another word Karoski lashed out and hit Donaldson a blow across the face with his open hand, so hard that the Mountie staggered back into a chair right behind him.

"Where's that money?" roared Karoski, standing over him.

Donaldson just clenched his teeth and said nothing. All the evil and brutality in Karoski seemed to be written on his face right then. He hadn't figured that Donaldson would have time or sense enough to cache the package. They just glared at each other for a minute, and Karoski knew he would never get anything out of the Mountie:

"There's other ways!" he said, and strode to the girl. In a second he had grabbed her wrist and twisted her arm behind her back. She gave a cry of pain, short and sharp.

"Now," said Karoski, with his teeth bared, "we'll see if you care to tell."

He twisted the girl's arm back farther. But she didn't cry out again.

"Don't tell! Don't tell!" she gasped.

Donaldson gave a roar of fury and lunged out of his chair, but the half-breed leaped in ahead of him and gave him a shove that sent him staggering back into the chair again.

"Tie him up!" said Karoski.

The breed snatched up a length of rope from a corner and, just as Donaldson was struggling up from the chair again, slipped the rope around the chain of the handcuffs and drew it back with a jerk. Then he tied the

rope to the back of the chair, and that, as you might say, was that!

Karoski was still holding the girl.

"Where's that money?" he asked Donaldson again.

"If I could get out of here, I'd kill you!"

Back went the girl's arm a little farther. Her eyes closed and her lips grew tight with the pain. But she didn't cry out. Not she.

"You Mounties are so fine with the women!" taunted Karoski. "Do you want to see her arm broken?"

Another twist—a vicious one. A cruel brute, that Karoski! This time the girl couldn't help it; she moaned, then bit her lip. Her head was flung back, and she writhed, trying to escape, but Karoski was too strong for her.

"Where's—that—money?"

Donaldson could only sit there and stare stupidly at her agony. As a man, he couldn't let her suffer like that—but as a Mountie, he couldn't give up that treaty money. That was his duty. And duty is a powerful thing. When you've been trained in it and know exactly what it is, you come to put it first as a matter of course.

The half-breed had disappeared. Whitten had slipped almost out of his chair. It was odd to hear him snoring so peacefully just then. Karoski was standing back of the girl like a man possessed.

"Tell, damn you!"

Another twist. This time it was too much. The girl almost fainted with the pain, and she screamed. It was horrible. Donaldson leaned forward in his chair and the sweat was wet on his forehead. He tried to get up, and he did get up, but the heavy chair overbalanced, and he tumbled over on the floor and lay there, unable to move.

Karoski gritted his teeth. The girl screamed again and again, sobbing and shrieking as she writhed back and forth. Whitten stirred and opened his eyes, blinking.

Finally Karoski let go the girl's wrist and moved aside. There is a limit, you know, and he realized by that time that he couldn't get anything out of Donaldson. The girl slumped forward in the chair and her arm hung limp and she cried and cried, wretchedly. Have you ever seen a woman you loved weeping with pain? Then you'll know how Donaldson felt and you'll understand that if he had been free he would have killed Karoski without a scruple.

THEY heard the back door close softly.

Karoski wheeled about, and he looked puzzled. Then, with a bound, he was out of the office, out in the living-room, and Donaldson heard him say: "Come back!"

The half-breed's voice answered, but they could not distinguish what he said, for he spoke very quietly, and Karoski gave a growl like an animal and they heard him ask:

"What's that under your coat?"

The half-breed didn't reply.

"It's the money!" said Karoski. "You found it! Give it over!"

And with that there started a hideous uproar in the next room. A chair went over with a crash. Two bodies thudded against the wall with such force that a picture fell to the floor with a tinkle of broken glass. Bang! Into the sideboard! Shattered china. And then there was a frightened squeal, a silence, a gasp, and a groan. They heard Karoski say: "Oh, you devil—you devil!" Then followed a heavy thud, as though he had fallen to the floor.

After that everything was quiet.

The girl stopped sobbing and gazed at Donaldson, frightened. Even Whitten sobered up a bit and looked

from one to the other in a bewildered sort of way. Then, in the doorway, they saw the half-breed.

His face was as expressionless as ever, but there was a light in his eyes that hadn't been there before, and they knew by that light that Karoski was dead and that the breed had killed him. The fellow was hugging a bulky package beneath his coat. He swayed a little as he stood there, and his eyes rested on the girl. Then, with a swift movement, he padded into the room, flung his free arm around her waist, and fairly lifted her from the chair.

She screamed then, but he tightened his grasp. She was small and light; he was a very powerful man. He swung her off her feet, under his arm, and then he was out of the room again, as swiftly and as silently as he had come in. Donaldson heard him kick open the screen door. The girl was shrieking with terror.

You never can tell what's going on in the mind of a fellow like that. He was primitive, you see. He had wanted her, no doubt, from the minute he had laid eyes on he. And now that chance had given him the money, now that Karoski was dead and he had to flee, he was going to take her.

The screams diminished toward the river.

DONALDSON was frantic. He struggled and kicked. He flung himself to and fro in a desperate effort to free himself. He got to his knees, tumbled over again, threshed backed and forth like a trapped animal. He could see Whitten looking at him as though in a daze.

"Don't you see?" he yelled at the trader. "That breed is stealing her. He's got the money, d'you hear? He's running away. Karoski is dead."

"Dead?" mumbled Whitten.

"Dead! The breed killed him. And now he's clearing out with the money. And your girl! Set me free, for God's sake!"

Drunk as he was, Whitten seemed to understand.

"Pete?" he said questioningly.

"Yes, the breed! He's double-crossed you all! Set me free before he gets away!"

"Double-crossed?" Whitten lurched out of the chair and staggered forward a step or two.

"Here!" snapped Donaldson. "In my right-hand pocket. The key. The key to those handcuffs. Get it!"

If ever he put a tone of command into his voice, he did it then. And Whitten stumbled over to his side in almost mechanical response to the stronger will. He knelt down and began to fumble for the key. He took an infernally long time about it. Once he stopped and muttered doubtfully: "Pete—has the money?"

"Yes," answered Donaldson, almost shouting. "Get that key. Quick!"

And finally Whitten did find the key. His hands were unsteady, and it seemed ages before he could fit the key into the little lock. But at last it clicked. Donaldson wrenched his wrists free of the cuffs and sprang to his feet. Whitten still knelt there stupidly, and Donaldson almost knocked him over as he reached for a rifle standing in a corner by the desk. He assured himself that it was loaded, then raced for the doorway, out onto the veranda and down the slope

THE girl was still screaming. Donaldson could see the two dark figures struggling out on the landing, and as he stumbled down the path he let fly with a shot over their heads.

He saw the big form of the breed straighten up. The girl managed

to break away from him, and ran back. Donaldson thundered down the slope.

The breed still had the Mountie's revolver. He flung up his arm and three shots banged out. But it was dark, and the fellow could hardly see Donaldson against the background of the hill. Donaldson fired again. Then, overcome with fright and conscious only of the desire to escape, the half-breed leaped into the canoe and pushed out from the landing.

The little canoe lurched and swayed, but the breed retained his balance, and then began to paddle like mad. Donaldson was at the landing now. He brushed past the girl. The canoe was almost in midstream. He pumped another shot after it.

The half-breed turned and fired again. He was in the stern of the light canoe, the bow was high out of the water, the craft was unsteady. That movement finished him. The canoe dipped far over to one side. The breed grabbed at the gunwales, and then there was a splash as the canoe tipped and he was flung into the water.

He shouted hoarsely; they could hear him splashing vainly, and then he disappeared. There was only the upturned canoe floating sluggishly on the river.

So that was the end of the half-breed, and Donaldson had the girl in his arms, and she was clinging to him like a lost child. And that, properly, is the end of the story as Donaldson told it to me.

They found the half-breed's body next morning, and he was still clinging to the bundle of treaty money that had been the cause of all this tragedy. In its waterproof cover, the money was undamaged. Karoski? The big fellow had knifed him. A bad way to die, but still—good riddance to bad rubbish.

When Donaldson went on to Fort McCrea the girl went with him, for there is a missionary at the post, and they had a job for him. They left Whitten standing on the end of the landing, a little, shriveled-up figure, looking pathetic and lonely in that great solitude. He stood watching them sadly until the canoe passed around the northern bend and the massed trees hid the trading post from view.

Bad Luck to Rescue a Drowning Man?

IN MANY parts of Europe, and especially in Scotland and the Balkans, the idea persists that to assist in the rescue of a drowning man brings bad luck. This inhuman idea is explained in a different way in almost every country in which it exists. In some places, where the people believe in fairies and all kinds of supernatural folk, they think that to save a man from the water is to anger the water sprites. This same belief appears even in Christian countries. Fate, the people say, has decreed that a man shall drown. You cannot cheat Fate for very long; therefore, if you save the life of the drowning man, you must, sooner or later, take his place and drown yourself.

Another explanation for this superstition, which seems even more difficult to understand, is that a man whose life has been saved will sooner or later injure in some way the one who has saved him.

Oooooh! A couple of 'em landed—right in the dark—where they were supposed to land. Kisses.

Miss Judas

By JOHN BAER

This story somehow reminds us of a foolish saying of a few years back—"The wages of gin is breath." It is the wildly thrilling tale of a burglarious enterprise culminating in a love affair in which Cupid threw aside his bow and arrows and seized a club.

HE WAS daring, he was clever, he was quick-witted. And he had brains. He planned his crimes carefully and executed them with consummate skill. He's in the hoosegow now. Love did it. Fact.

The narrative of his last crime is commonplace, almost trite up to the point at which Love butted in. Then it became wonderful. Love is like that. In this case it even turned detective and introduced a strictly novel technique into the science of sleuthing. No detective could have thought of anything half as bizarre.

IT HAPPENED in the home of Mrs. Ruth Lambert, in Kew Hills, Long Island. This comely young matron was the wife of an inventor of electrical devices, who had risen from poverty to opulence. Mrs. Lambert was the type of lady who has no desire to conceal from the world the fact that she is rich. A naïve carelessness was one of her outstand-

ing traits, and this trait manifested itself especially with reference to values. A five-thousand-dollar jewel was treated by her with no greater respect than a fifty-cent one.

Owen Bourne, a tall, handsome, smooth-mannered rascal, who had an ever-ready eye open for just such "customers," had contrived to join Mrs. Lambert's social circle. Bourne himself came of a reputable family and was well educated, so he had had little trouble in making desirable acquaintances. But he was crafty in his selection, deliberately choosing those who were inclined to "flash" rather than those with conservative tendencies.

On a previous visit to the Lambert home, Bourne had been invited by Mr. Lambert to inspect the laboratory, which was on the third floor. Coming out of the laboratory, the two men had paused in the hall near the boudoir, to chat. The boudoir door had been open, and Bourne had seen the reflection of Mrs. Lambert in a mirror. She was pulling necklaces, rings, pins, and other jewelry out of a metal box; and then, when she had found what she wanted, she replaced the other articles, locked the box with a small key, and put the box into the top dresser drawer. Bourne was confident that he could open that box lock with a piece of wire; he was certain he could open it with one of his skeleton keys.

And on this particular evening he intended to do the job. He had laid his plans with his customary carefulness, and was, so he thought, prepared to meet any emergency. But of course he had not counted on Love.

THE Lamberts were giving a dance in their home. Thirty-odd couples were in the large hall on the lower floor when Bourne, who was one of the invited guests, got busy.

The band was playing a lively fox-trot when Bourne slipped out and hurried up two flights of the front stairs. On the third floor landing he paused for several moments in an attitude of listening, but no sound assailed his ears except those from below: music and the gay chattering of the guests.

Although this job presented no unusual features, he nevertheless found, both to his surprise and annoyance, that he was highly excited. The hand which was on the bannister was trembling. He worried about the matter a bit and tried to place the blame upon something definite.

It had been a bit difficult for him to get away from the dance hall. He had somehow managed to step from the center of one group directly into another; twice he had had to put off his work for another dance. This, he decided, might have caused his nervousness.

Or perhaps it was merely the prospect of a very large haul which had excited him. Mrs. Lambert, to be sure, was wearing a goodly portion of her jewels, but Bourne had an idea that what remained in the metal box was enough to make the loot the most valuable he had ever filched.

He sighed and said: "Whew!" Then automatically his hand went into his hip-pocket, and he drew out a small flask of gin.

"A little straightener will fix me up," he reflected as he swallowed with audible gulps.

He pocketed the flask again, stepped to the wall, and pushed a button. The single dim hall-light went out. Bourne had considered this detail a safety measure. Some person might come up while he was in the boudoir. That person would be certain to switch on the light. The light would act as signal; Bourne would be warned and would escape through one of the boudoir doors

leading into other rooms. He did not expect to be interrupted, but he was preparing for the unexpected.

In the darkness Bourne hurried quietly along the hall till he reached the boudoir, which he knew was the next to the last room on the left side of the hall. He found the door open. The position of the dresser was known to him, and by the faint light streaming in through a window he groped his way to it without colliding with any object. The top dresser-drawer was locked.

It was not until then that Bourne drew his small flash-light. He threw a thin ray on the lock and worked patiently for about five minutes with nothing more than a strong hairpin before the lock yielded. One of his skeleton keys fitted the small metal box.

The treasure lay before him. With his gloved hands he greedily transferred rings, bar pins, pendants, ear-rings, bracelets, and necklaces to the cotton batting he had brought with him. He closed but left unlocked the metal box and the dresser drawer, and then tiptoed out into the hall. His flash-light and his loot were in his pocket; his hands were free.

IN the hall it happened, all of a sudden. He had come up the front, but was going down the rear stairs. His hands had just found the bannister when a voice which seemed to be directly behind him called:

"Ken! Oh, Ken—wait!"

Now actually this was the voice of Love, but to Bourne it was merely the voice of a woman—a low-pitched voice, pleasant and eager. It threw him into utter confusion.

He did not recognize the voice, he had no idea why the woman was there or how she had got there. And she had neglected to switch on the light. It was all wrong, completely wrong.

If he ran, the woman might scream. If he stayed put, she'd crash into him. Nor did he feel it proper to use violence.

"Ken," came the voice again—"Ken, be a nice boy. Don't pout."

Bourne went down one step, and then a pair of arms came out of the darkness and managed somehow to encircle his neck.

He seized the hands firmly and tried gently to disengage his neck.

"All right, big boy, struggle." The voice was now reduced to a whispering coo. "Struggle wiz me, you big silly!"

Smack! Smack! Ooooh! A couple of 'em landed—right in the dark—where they were supposed to land. Kisses. On Owen Bourne's lips. Ain't Love wonderful?"

Then—"Why—why, Ken, you—you've been—"

"Chiggers!" Bourne's wits had suddenly returned. He spoke in a gruff, disguised tone. "In back of you—"

His neck was free.

"Look out!" he added.

A little squeal, a gasp, came from the lady.

BOURNE sped down the stairs. On the second floor he ran along the hall toward the front of the house. He ran expertly, and the carpet was heavy. Near the front stairs he paused to listen.

He heard pattering feet come down the top rear stairs and continue down the lower rear flight.

He had thrown the lady off the trail! He sighed, and took another snifter. For the time being he was safe. The gentlemen's wraps had been placed in a room on the sec-

ond floor. He could explain his presence on this floor by saying he had come up to get something out of his overcoat.

And as a matter of fact that's where he went—into the temporary cloak-room. This room was lighted. He knelt as though to tie his shoelace. While he was about this hocus-pocus, he thrust the ball of cotton batting which contained the loot under a bureau, where it was out of sight but easily accessible. He placed his rubber overshoes beside the bureau, and then wandered leisurely down the front stairs and back into the dance hall.

His pulse was normal again and he had entirely regained his composure. Except for the two kisses, events had proceeded exactly as he had planned them. If the theft were discovered because of the kissing busybody, he was nevertheless safe. Nothing would be found on him, and no one had seen him commit the robbery or hide the jewels.

If the theft were discovered, a hue and cry would be raised, and he would leave the jewels where they were. If no hue and cry were raised, it would mean that the theft had not been discovered, in which case he would take the jewels with him when he went home.

It was not until two hours later that the party broke up, and during this time Owen Bourne enjoyed himself immensely. He danced with several beautiful ladies and formed several new friendships, some of them for business purposes.

BUT he put Clara Gardner under the heading of strictly pleasure. A lovely lass, this Clara, if ever there was one; dark-haired, brown-eyed, dimpled, and just sufficiently rounded to be chubby without being plump. Bourne fell for her like a ton of bricks, and after the first five minutes he would have fallen on or even under a ton of bricks for her.

She had a way with her, did Clara—a way of leaning slightly so that her lovely shoulder barely touched you; a way of gazing up with slightly parted lips and come-hither eyes; a way—oh, well, ask Bourne. He knows.

The band was playing "Give Us a Little Kiss," and Clara's eyes were daring him: "Will ya, huh?"

And Bourne did, twice, behind a potted palm and on the lips.

Clara nestled closer and crooned: "'Sa slow party. Lemonate. Phoo! Y'not got somepin' on the hip, is it?"

"To drink?" asked Bourne.

Clara reached for a half-empty lemonade glass on a tray on the settee.

"Put some taste in it, Mister."

Bourne poured some gin from his flask into the glass.

She wrote her name, address, and telephone number on his cuff. Then she said: "Now chase me," and skipped away.

But half an hour later she drew him back of a palm again and sighed: "Say, I'm dying of ennui. You got a car?"

"I have. I came in a car."

"Then drive me over the Brooklyn Bridge and dump me in the river to wake me up. Is it?"

"Meet you on the back lawn in ten minutes," said Bourne.

He took his leave from the hostess and went upstairs to the cloak-room, which was empty. He put on his overcoat and his overshoes and retrieved the cotton batting from under the bureau.

Clara Gardner was on the rear lawn, all wrapped up in a fussy coat. There were about two dozen

cars on this lawn, but Bourne's car, a small racing model, was easily distinguishable.

They were in the car. Bourne was starting the engine.

"The Brooklyn Bridge, I believe you said?" He smiled at the girl.

"Anywhere you please," answered a voice. "But only after you have permitted us to search you."

The voice was not that of the beautiful Clara. It was gruff, hoarse, peremptory. The speaker was on the running board, and when Bourne turned toward him he drew open his coat and displayed a badge.

From the shadows of other cars two other men approached. Bewildered, Bourne turned to the girl beside him.

"Bad man got my sister's jewels in his pocket," she cooed. "Yes? Then let's go places. Let's go police station."

Bourne had the jewels in his inside coat pocket, wrapped in cotton batting. Under the circumstances it would have been absurd of him to raise a row.

HALF an hour later, in the Kew Hills police station, Clara Gardner was thrilling an excited audience with a breathless narrative.

"See? I went up to the third floor to meet Ken. He's my boy friend, Kenneth Ames. All of a sudden I found out I didn't have my vanity case, and I said to Ken: 'You run up to that room on the third floor where they got the ladies' things and get my vanity case out of my pocket.' See? Then all of a sudden I found my vanity case under my chair and so I ran up to the third floor to tell Ken he needn't get it.

"And then, in the dark, I ran into this Mr. Bourne, and I thought he was Ken, so I givimakiss. A couple, see? And he ran away from me! So I thought that was flukey; and so I told my sister, Mrs. Lambert, and she looked in her boudoir and found that her jewels had been stolen. So I thought right away that the thief probably hid them, and that he wouldn't have them on him until he left the house. What was the good of raising a rumpus? So I said to my sister: 'You let me find this crook.' See?"

"And Mrs. Lambert was willing to let you play detective?" asked the desk lieutenant.

"The stolen jewels," spoke up Mrs. Lambert, "are worth only about nine hundred dollars. I did not think it worth while to raise a rumpus, as Clara puts it, for so small an amount. My valuable pieces were put in a safety vault last week, at my husband's urging."

Clara continued: "Well, when I givimakiss, I was standing on the top stairs—see?—and he was standing one step lower, and in spite of this I had to get up on my toes, he was so big. So I said to myself he must be more than six foot two, anyhow. There were about thirty men present, but only five of them were more than six foot two, so I got another girl to help me—Ellen Kremer. So Ellen took two men and I took three, see?"

"Where did you take them?" asked the lieutenant.

"No place. We just tried to find out which one of the men had gin on him."

"Gin?"

"Yes. When I givimakiss—see?—I smelled gin, strong gin. I was just going to say to him: 'Ken'—you see, I thought he was Ken—'Ken, you've been drinking,' when he ran away from me.

"Well, none of the five tall men had gin on them except Mr. Bourne. So I called up the cops and then I invited Mr. Bourne to take me for a ride and had him arrested. And he had the jewels on him. Isn't that wonderful?"

The lieutenant said gravely: "Let us suppose that Bourne had had no liquor on him, but that he had been given a drink by one of the other, smaller men, just before the robbery."

"What of it?" asked Clara. "Even if the thief had no gin *on* him, he certainly had some of it *in* him. On him or in him, I was sure to find it. I kissed him again, see? I givimakiss on the settee, and he was still reeking with the stuff. Phoo!"

Smiling, the lieutenant turned to Bourne. "What have you to say?"

"Nothing," answered Bourne curtly, "except that I am sorry I had no opportunity of driving her over the Brooklyn Bridge and dump—"

"Fresh!" interrupted Clara, having the last word.

Saying "God Bless You" When a Person Sneezes

THE custom of saying "God bless you" or some similar prayer whenever a person sneezes is very old and is found in many countries. The Italians have a form which is most unflattering to the ladies: after the usual pious hope they add another: "May all your children be boys!"

Many people have tried to explain this custom, but without complete success. One explanation advanced is that it began in the year 750 A. D. At that time, it is said, Europe was ravaged by an epidemic of violent sneezing (probably influenza), from which many people died. The air was filled with such bad "influence" that many of those who sneezed straightway died. Therefore, Gregory the Great, at that time Pope, devised a prayer to be said after every "Ker-choo!" This is a beautiful explanation, but unfortunately does not fit the facts, as the custom is much older than Gregory. A more probable origin for it is the old belief that spirits, good and bad, could enter the body or leave at will. The entrance of a bad spirit was supposed to cause a commotion; hence a prayer for protection against it.

Nearer came the beautiful Oriental, her knife rising at every step.

The Blue Vase

By PAUL ERNST

The Blue Vase was the most beautiful thing in Wake Tyler's life—until it led to something even more beautiful. And he couldn't keep either.

FOR quite a while Wake Tyler stood in front of the shop window. It was a rather small, cluttered window, entirely matching the store behind it, which was also small and cluttered. A sign over the door announced crookedly that the small, cluttered store was an antique shop—*Golder's, Antiques.*

In the window was a general collection of things—several trays of bulky jewelry, antique enough, at any rate, to have lost most of its gold plating; a cracked spinning wheel; old wooden chests and boxes; a miscellaneous brood of pottery and glassware.

At none of these things, however, was Wake Tyler looking. His eyes were riveted on an object that stood well in the front of the window and off a bit to one side—a blue vase.

The vase did not look at home in the window. It was exotic, odd, breathing of the luxury of Oriental palaces. It was, Wake decided, the most beautiful thing of its kind he had ever seen. Deep blue at the base, it grew paler and paler till the squat but graceful neck was shaded a light morning sky color. The

work undoubtedly of some rare master in far-off China.

Wake was an artist himself, though in those days he was not yet a master; and the beautiful thing appealed to him, would not let him leave the window. It seemed to cast a blue glow over the entire mass of mediocre junk that surrounded it. Shadowy hands reached out from its sky-blue neck and supplicated, begged him to be its owner. He tried to turn away before the beauty of the vase should ensnare him too firmly: beauty always robbed him of all his will. But he could not leave. He could only stand, tall and lean and a little stooped, hatless, and with his brown hair in waving disorder, and gaze at the work of the old Chinese master.

He explored dismally in his pockets with his long, square-tipped fingers. There were, he knew, exactly thirty-eight dollars there. He had just sold a picture for that modest sum. It had to last him until he sold another one—whenever that might be.

The vase was priced at thirty-five dollars. An absurd price. It was worth five times that much, a rare bargain at thirty-five dollars. Still, no matter how good a buy it was at that price, thirty-five from thirty-eight left—just three dollars. The bread-box was in a sad condition; and the shelves behind the screen that shut off his kitchen from the rest of the bare studio were distressingly empty.

NO, HE couldn't do it! He sternly commanded his legs to take him away from there. Whereupon they obediently carried him into the shop and up to a counter behind which stood a deep-eyed, elderly man with iron-gray hair like a wave, and a stubble of beard on his lined face.

"The Chinese vase," said Wake—"is it for sale?"

The deep-eyed old man was no salesman, it seemed. Instead of rubbing his hands and darting for the vase to croon over it and show its best points, he merely leaned a little harder against the counter and brooded into Wake's lean face.

"It is," he said at last.

"For thirty-five dollars?" inquired Wake.

"That's what the tag says."

Wake stared down into the deep-set eyes. He decided that he liked Mr. Golder.

"It's worth more than that," he suggested.

"It's worth about a hundred and eighty," agreed the imperturbable Mr. Golder.

"And still it's for sale for thirty-five dollars?"

"Yes," said Mr. Golder, never leaving off the queer, brooding stare with which he was favoring his customer's eager face.

"I'll take it." Wake displayed the slender roll that was to have replenished the bread-box and the kitchen shelves, and that was to have bought a new pair of shoes to replace the worn ones on his feet.

"I wouldn't buy it if I were you," said Mr. Golder.

Wake looked down at his diminutive fortune and smiled.

"It will take about all I've got, all right. But I simply can't pass up such a bargain."

"It's not a bargain, young man. There's a history to the vase that robs it of some of its value. In fact, to me, it robs it of all of its value. I had intended to keep it for myself, but certain reasons have prompted me to dispose of it. At first I thought of giving it away. But I have no one to give it to, being rather a solitary person; and, besides, my shopkeeper's instincts

were outraged by such a thought. So I put it in the window with the ridiculous price of thirty-five dollars on it."

"What's the depressing history?" asked Wake cheerfully.

"Well, to begin with, it's a burial urn—though it was obviously never intended for such a purpose. There are human ashes in it."

"What of it?"

"Just this: the vase is haunted. Its real owner, in spite of the fact that it is for sale in my window, is a spirit!"

"A ghost in a vase," smiled Wake. "I have heard of haunted houses and castles, and once of a haunted tree. But I never before heard of haunted pottery."

"You never before heard of a vase with such a history, either," said the old man with a touch of irritation. "Do you want to hear it?"

"I do," said Wake earnestly, "very much."

So, in the manner of the ancient bards, the old man told the tale of the blue vase—a story that was later confirmed so astoundingly.

"QUITE a while ago, though it is only yesterday in a country like China, there lived a Mandarin's daughter who fell in love with an English sailor. There was no broken butterfly motif in the affairs of these two. The sailor, mate on one of the old square riggers, renounced his nationality, his ship, everything, and settled down with his golden Chinese beauty.

"There was a great plague. The sailor's old ship happened to be in port near their home. They fled on the ship to escape the plague. They were too late—the sailor husband carried the seeds of death with him. He died and was buried at sea. A little later, just as land was sighted for the first time since they had set sail, the golden girl from China died too.

"Before her consciousness deserted her, she expressed a wish to be cremated. Her ashes were to be placed under seal in this blue vase I have in my window—a wedding present from her husband, which was most dear to her and which she had carried with her. The vase was then to be thrown into the sea, so that her spirit could rejoin the spirit of her seafaring husband.

"The captain of the ship carried out her instructions—all but that of throwing the vase into the water. It is a beautiful thing, as you have noticed, and his heart urged him to keep it. Surely, he must have thought, there was no harm in preserving it; surely he was justified in disobeying a command prompted by so pagan a superstition. So he placed it in his cabin, where he could see and admire its coloring.

"He never came back to port. The ship sailed in without him. He had, it was reported, been mysteriously lost at sea."

"What a story!" sighed Wake.

"Odd enough," agreed Mr. Golder. "And now you see why the blue vase is not as desirable as it looks?"

"Oh, no!" said Wake. "I am all the more eager to buy it."

"In spite of what I have told you?"

"Because of it!" said Wake. "Anyway, I am not a sea captain, so your history doesn't dismay me."

"There is more to it than that. . . .

"The first mate sold it to one of the ship owners. Both were quickly killed in a rather messy accident. From then on it has brought nothing but tragedy to its owners. Many of them have been stabbed—by a person or persons unknown, to quote the coroners' findings!"

Wake glanced out of the window. It was a beautiful, calm, sunny day. Outside, a group of ragged little boys were shrieking over the rules of some game or other. The world was quite prosaic, quite remote from tales of murder and plague and romances of sailors and mandarins' golden-skinned daughters.

He gazed covertly at the shopkeeper. The man was really quite old; and by his own confession a solitary person. It was evident that he lived in his store. Not improbable that his brain was a bit turned by the solitude, the surroundings that breathed of ages ago.

"How is it that you yourself have not been troubled?" he asked curiously. "You have had it in your store for some time, haven't you?"

"Oh, but I have been troubled! I think the only reason I haven't been killed, too, is that I own it in a commercial way. The other possessors of the blue vase have valued and loved it as a personal belonging. I am only a shopkeeper, so the spirit has threatened—but has at least let me live. When one's house has been fraudulently acquired by others, one doesn't take revenge on the auctioneer!"

"What has happened to you?" asked Wake interestedly. Sane or not, the old man was diverting with his outrageous narrative.

"Every night when I am asleep the spirit in the vase visits me. A sort of vapor comes from the mouth of the vase. It rises to a cloud, and from this cloud is gradually shaped the image of the Mandarin's daughter. She is quite beautiful"—his deep eyes flickered with an incongruous spark of youth and of what might have been—"but she is very threatening! In her hand she has a long curved knife, and she threatens me with it.

"'I commanded that the blue vase with my ashes in it be cast into the sea,' she says, in excellent English. 'Unless you carry out this command that the others ignored, you too shall die!'

"Then I remember the knife—and think of the unfortunate ones who were stabbed by those persons unknown. And I have an idea, my friend, that I know who is the person unknown who did the stabbing!"

"Nonsense!" expostulated Wake. "Ghosts are intangible things, and unable to carry knives material enough to make real holes."

"Possibly so," the old man shrugged. "Anyway, it is disquieting. Last night she was more determined than usual that I throw the blue vase into the sea."

"Well, why don't you?" asked Wake with a whimsical, humoring smile. "You've had plenty of time to carry out the lady's command. Why haven't you done it?"

THE old man shook his head.

"Do you know, I can't bear to do it. The idea of that beautiful thing being thrown away . . . So this morning I put it up for sale. I hope I shall be rid of it before nightfall. I haven't slept well lately."

"You'll be rid of it before night," Wake promised. He counted out thirty-five dollars by the simple expedient of retaining three one-dollar bills and handing the rest of his roll over to Golder.

"You're determined to buy it?"

"I certainly am," said Wake, his eyes gleaming with possession. He laughed. "I hope you don't discourage all your sales like this. You wouldn't do much business if you did."

"You're an artist, aren't you?" Mr. Golder made answer. "I thought so. And not too successful—if you'll pardon the impertinence. I hate to

see you spend the money you must need, for something that will bring you no pleasure in its possession."

But he was wrong, as it turned out; though the pleasure was not unalloyed.

"IT WILL be a joy to paint," murmured Wake to himself as he hurried to the studio with the blue vase tightly held under his arm. "And a despair!" he added, gloating dubiously over the delicate shading that made the vase seem a living thing of gleaming tints.

It was noon when he got home. Forgetting lunch and everything else in his eagerness to inspect his treasure more closely, he tore off its wrappings and set it tenderly on a stand in the best light the big room afforded.

A gorgeous thing! What a delicate tomb for a golden Chinese princess! A delightful conceit that robbed death greatly of its sombreness. If the blue vase really contained ashes of the dead . . .

He took it closer to the window and tilted it so that the light would shine down into it. A black, pitchy substance like an air-tight pot lid shut off the lower two-thirds of the vase. Very probably it was a thin shell, with the ashes underneath.

Wake took his big, rather dull kitchen knife and sacrilegiously jabbed at the protecting black stuff. It was quite solid and rubbery. He did not dare to pry too hard, for fear of injuring the vase. But he worked away stubbornly until the knife, sliding on the rubbery pitch, pinched his finger between its cutting edge and the inside of the vase. The result was a quite respectable slash.

"The Oriental beauty takes revenge!" mused Wake, sucking his finger. "But it's the left hand, so it's all right."

He set it back on the stand and prepared to start work. He had no blank canvases—some of the thirty-eight dollars should have gone for these—but without a qualm he took an old canvas with a mediocre sketch on it, and washed it out with flat gray paint.

This he set on his easel. He stared wide-eyed at the blue vase, commenced to draw. . . .

The last flickering light of the afternoon failed before he sighed and relinquished his brushes. He stood back to inspect his work as well as he could in the growing dusk. He was pleased beyond measure at the way the blue vase was shaping upon the canvas. This would be the best thing he had ever done, he was sure.

He had planned to paint it as he had first seen it—in a shop window. The vase was placed well down at the right of the canvas, with three-quarters of the square left blank. This blank space would later be a background of worthless pottery and brass jewelry, indicated by suggestion rather than done in minute detail. The vase would give a distinctly blue cast to the whole picture, illuminating it like a light.

Too tired to contrive a dinner out of the odds and ends in his cupboard, he went out to the basement restaurant nearby, where one could get good food for not too much money. There he met several intimate friends, and it was late before the inevitable discussion of art and philosophies broke up and he came home to bed.

As he slowly undressed, his eyes strayed constantly toward the blue vase. The beautiful thing! He must be sure and set it out of the way, so that it wouldn't be knocked off the stand.

He fell asleep with that thought in his mind; and it seemed as

though soft fingers stroked his brow and gently closed his eyes.

THE big studio was in utter darkness. The blue vase, still on its stand, was not apparent in the gloom. The regular sound of Wake's breathing whispered of his heavy sleep.

Then a change began to make itself felt. Nothing tangible—just a sort of intensity in the air, as though it were highly charged with electricity.

A faint blue light grew into dim being, seeming to come from everywhere, flooding every corner. As the light grew in soft brilliance, it could be identified with the vase. Around the graceful thing the glow was stronger than anywhere else—an aura.

The light now was as sharp as clear moonlight. It seemed to crackle with uneasy force, to move in restless sheets. Wake stirred on his couch. Then he sat up, eyes wide and alarmed.

A thin blue vapor, like tobacco smoke, was curling up out of the blue vase. It did not dissolve, but gathered into a compact little cloud that attained larger and larger proportions.

The vapor stopped rising from the mouth of the vase. The mass swayed like a cloud battered by wind.

Wake rubbed his eyes disbelievingly as a head began to be apparent in the cloud. Coils and coils of heavy, jet-black hair, gleaming like ebony; deep black eyes with a hardly perceptible slant, as old as the moon and as young as a bud in the spring; a straight little nose over red, red lips; skin like soft gold satin; a slender body cased in red and gold China silk; adorable trousers ending in incredibly tiny feet.

The Mandarin's daughter!

For moments on end, Wake was too enthralled by the marvelous beauty of the picture before his eyes to think, to speculate, to do anything but feel with all his artist's appreciation. The sheer loveliness of the spectre dragged his heart from his breast, leaving him hollow and empty. He felt deliriously that in her only he lived, that in her only was life, that he had never lived before and would cease to exist should her beauty be removed.

The piled mass of gleaming black hair, the poignantly red lips, the faint speck of pink at the tiny nostrils, the amber velvet skin, the brilliant gold and crimson silk; and, setting off the whole, the living blue light which emanated from the vase and was strongest around it, like a dim aura.

He tried to think what it reminded him of. Some picture he had seen—what? Some picture he had planned back in the caverns of his mind—what? The unfinished canvas with the blue vase in the right-hand corner caught his eye—the blue vase which he had planned to have like a light illuminating the rest of the square. That was it! But instead of the cheap background of flimsy jewelry and worthless glassware, use that blank three-quarters to depict the princess—a thin trickle of vapor still pouring from the vase and ending in the tiny feet to show the source of her appearance—glorious!

THE golden princess moved slightly; and on the instant the scene changed from one of mere radiance to one of exquisite danger. The black eyes were hard, and glittered angrily. The soft fingers with the long nails were curved like wrathful talons. There was a deep menace about her now.

The tiny feet moved, carrying their owner slowly toward the couch

on which Wake lay. He saw, in one small fist, a curving, evil knife!

His racing thoughts returned to the old store-keeper—his brooding guess at the identity of the unknown person who had stabbed the owners of the blue vase!

Nearer came the beautiful Oriental, her knife rising at every step. Now she was almost within striking distance, the carved bone handle at her breast, the needle point trembling with readiness for the flashing downward stroke at his bare throat.

There was no question of defense. With every scrap of muscle twitching to the supreme call of self-preservation, he was helpless—a tree already quivering to the bite of the axe, but unable to move. Just his eyes were alive — staring at the deadly fascination of the blade.

"You bought my vase!" Her voice was a brook, a deep, compelling brook that hurries to the grim waterfall. "You paid no heed to the old man's warning. You bought my vase!"

He could not even move his head to nod agreement. Only his eyes answered for him—eyes in which a breathless admiration of supreme beauty struggled with a fear of death.

"You know what has happened to the other owners of the vase!"

Wake closed his eyes as the curved dagger made a dancing gesture to point the unfinished sentence. After a long time, feeling no sharp edge at his throat, he opened them again. And now, in their wide attention, fear had nearly been put to rout by that awed, exalted admiration.

"You know what I am going to do!" Her voice was a soft, fierce battle song.

Wake did not answer directly. He stared breathlessly at her, drinking her in. And now in his eyes there was no fear at all—only that vast admiration.

"How beautiful!" he whispered. "How beautiful!"

"I am going to kill you." The voice was as emotionless, as chill and sharp, as the dagger she held. "I have seen to it that every one who acquired my vase was warned beforehand that he must throw it away or go in peril of death. You, too, were warned. You laughed, and had no intention of doing as I commanded so long ago. You, too, die!"

"But if I die"—Wake spoke as though his words were idle interruptions of an ecstasy too rare to admit the thought of death—"if I die, I will have no chance to do as you desire. If you let me live, I will carry out your commands."

"Your promise comes too late. You should have done so at once."

"I wanted so to paint it," said Wake. "I promise now to do as you ask."

"So did the others promise. And in the end all of them clung to the vase they had learned to adore."

"And no wonder," breathed Wake, "since, having the vase, they also had—you!"

"I can see that you, too, are going to disobey me."

There was cold finality in the voice. Again the knife was raised for the flashing downward stroke.

He did not close his eyes this time. He stared unblinking at the flawless face that was like a jewel cut from ice. A pagan goddess, she was, a final and immovable judge from whom there was no appeal. She was splendid in her conscienceless, elemental sureness; one with the blind, destructive forces that compel worship even as they destroy.

AS HE gazed, there crept into his face some of the rapt expression that must have moulded the

features of Cleopatra's subjects as they were led away to death by their queen's petulant command—adoration too vast to recognize any death, unaccusing, utterly forgiving.

At that soft fire that shone from his eyes, the girl's firm hand faltered. The dagger stayed poised an instant longer before beginning its downward sweep.

"You do not look at me as the others did," she mused. "They were only afraid. But you—in your eyes is a look that is softer than fear."

Wake smiled. He had again the feeling that his heart had been dragged from his body, that he was living only in the beauty of the girl before him, that life without her was now impossible.

"Strike!" he urged.

The knife sank slowly until it swung, futile and meaningless, in her soft hand.

"I can't," said the girl. "How can I when you look—like that?"

"I could wish that you would," breathed Wake, "since you are not for me."

"What do you mean?" asked the princess. "Why do you say a thing like that? Why do you look at me like that?"

"For every man," answered Wake slowly, his eyes still devouring the rare perfection of her beauty, "there is one being for whom he would live or give his life. There is one person, his ideal, who can take his crippled existence and make it whole and shining. Sometimes the man meets her and takes her for his own. Then what radiant joy! But sometimes he sees her too late. What tragedy! When that happens, do you wonder that he would not care whether he lived or died? Do you wonder that he would look—like that?"

"But surely," cried the girl, "he could not tell in a few short seconds that the one he had met was the one——"

"He could, and he did! And, meeting you, I have met my tragedy—the bitterest! I find you, and you are separated from me by a double bar—the gulf that lies between two worlds, and love for another so great that you have taken lives for its sake! So I say—strike!"

"No, no! How could I after you had said such a thing? I couldn't hurt you after that. I am a woman, not a stone. And I am moved by love as any other woman."

"It wouldn't be hurting me," said Wake wistfully. "After you leave, as you will soon, my heart will be dead. The body might as well die, too. And I should like death—from your hands."

With the unthinking selfishness of a great love, the Mandarin's daughter caught at his words.

"Then you will be very lonely when, in a few moments, I have left you for ever? You will be tortured by being shut off from me?"

"Don't!" gasped Wake, shrinking away from the appalling thought.

"Then can't you understand?" begged the golden girl. "Won't you throw the vase into the sea, so that I may not forever be shut off from my husband? We have each suffered that torture for a hundred years."

The little hands were not firm any more. They were joined together in pleading. The knife had dropped to the floor and faded from sight like a bad dream.

IT WAS a long time before Wake could trust his voice. Then——

"I can understand," he said at length. His words were low and smothered. His eyes were closed so she shouldn't see how her blind devotion to another had hurt. He had found his paradise, but how little room was there for him! "I

can understand. And to-morrow I'll do as you ask. I will take your vase and throw it into the ocean. But it will be throwing my soul away."

"Oh, I thank you! How can I thank you? But I know that I cannot. There is no answer to that look in your eyes but one—and that I am not able to give."

"The thanks I would value most," said Wake wistfully, "would be the gift to me of your blue vase. If I could only keep it to dream over when your loss is too keen to be borne!"

"No, not even that can I grant you. It must rest at the bottom of the sea before I can join the one I love even as you love me. It is a horrid, clinging shell that holds me tied to it. You *must* do as I ask!"

"But I can't let you vanish so completely out of my life. Could I have, please, some little token of your visit, something of yours to take its place?"

The Mandarin's daughter glanced thoughtfully about. Her eye rested on the canvas—the unfinished picture of the blue vase, with three-quarters of the square blank. She smiled; and Wake trembled at the beauty in the red line of her lips.

"You shall paint me!" she declared. "You shall paint me with my blue vase. Why, you have left the biggest part of your canvas empty, with the vase down at the corner—it is as though you had known of my coming and were prepared!"

"I left the space blank for a contrasting background," said Wake absently. He was absorbed by her loveliness, wishing she would smile again.

"You shall put me there instead," commanded the Princess. "Come—I shall sit for you like any humble coolie's daughter."

Wake shook his head miserably.

"But why not?" asked the Princess. "Wouldn't you rather have my likeness than anything else I could bestow? And would you not rather paint that likeness yourself than have it from another's hand?"

"I could never do it," despaired Wake. "You are beyond me—too perfect—too much for my poor ability."

"Try it, my friend," urged the girl gently. "You may do better than you think."

And so it was. Wake was too greatly stirred, too filled with a longing to preserve his golden girl's memory, too fiercely eager to paint exquisitely a beautiful creation, to admit the possibility of failure. His hand was machine-like in its precision. It was bloodless, incapable of human error.

With a few strokes the blue brilliancy of the vase was toned down so that it no longer dominated the canvas but was softly subservient to the rest of the picture. His brush seemed to rush of itself, filling in without need of direction, while his eyes embraced the marvelous beauty of his subject.

A SIGH that was like a sob. The painting was complete. In all her rare perfection the daughter of China, sitting on a vast, fanciful blue cushion, with her tiny feet under her, peered at him from the easel. With a single, twisting, sinuous stroke he traced a wisp of vapor like a natal cord from the mouth of the blue vase to the tip of one of the silk scraps of slipper that just peeped out against the blue of the billowing cushion. The picture was finished.

Rising, the girl glided toward him. She looked with pursed red lips at the swift work he had done.

"You see, you needn't have been

afraid to try," she smiled. "It is quite good, isn't it?"

"Good?" exclaimed Wake. "Good? I shall never do as well again. I have reached the peak. From now on nothing is possible but descent." He pressed his hands to his burning forehead.

"You must not say that," entreated the girl. "Oh, I am so sorry for the way your eyes say things when they rest on my face! They say things I cannot answer. Look—I will do more than just give you my impression on a piece of cloth. I will make you a famous artist. I swear it by the shades of my ancestors!"

"To live and die in solitary glory." Wake's smile was twisted. "For of course nothing else is possible after—you. I shall live alone. Alone. But"—he shrugged as one does on receiving an utterly worthless present that is yet precious because given by a loved one—"I thank you for your gift. It is very desirable to be famous—I suppose."

The Mandarin's daughter turned hastily away from Wake's smile.

"Close your eyes," she commanded, her soft voice infinitely tender. "Close your eyes. I am going now. And I don't think you would care to see that."

Wake closed his eyes, his head bent low on his chest. He felt lips brush his eyelids, soft fingers touch his cheek——

When he opened his eyes again the room was in darkness. The soft blue light was very dim—the candle flame of an expiring life, it seemed, as it sank lower and lower. The four walls, the floor and ceiling, made an empty resounding box; and the very air was lifeless and exhausted, as though all vitality had been drained from it.

With a cry, Wake dashed to the vase. He clutched at it with eager fingers. A thin trickle of vapor mocked him for an instant. Then it faded, and the empty vase yawned coldly up at him.

"I am alone," said Wake, sinking back on his cot slowly and with an immense weariness. "I am alone."

NEXT morning he went down to the docks. A small boat was about to leave one of the piers—a boat devoted to humble families busied with a day's outing, and boys with their girls.

He got on the boat, his face so haggard and his eyes so wide and unseeing that those around him moved away half in wonder, half in fear. Under his arm was the gorgeous blue vase.

Far out from shore he held the vase over the rail at arm's length. As blue as the cloudless sky and as softly brilliant, it seemed to stretch forth shadowy hands which clutched at his wrists.

Shuddering, he clasped it as it was about to fall, and held it tightly against him. Might not the golden girl come to speak with him again if he kept the vase? Certainly he would never see her if he let it drop. For she would be far away—with another.

His mouth clamped tight on the pain of that thought. With another! He could not do it. He would not do it! Let her be as angry as she pleased. Let her use her curved dagger if she chose. At least, he would see her again.

How could she have asked such a thing, knowing his adoration? And of course she had realized it—she had plumbed its depths in his eyes. What had she said about that love of her that shone in his eyes?

"Can you not understand? Throw the vase into the sea that I may rejoin my husband. He too looked at me—that way!"

And he had given her his promise. What a glorious light of gladness had flooded her face when he had given her his promise! How she loved her sailor husband, dead a century ago!

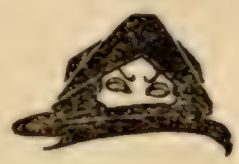
He held the blue vase caressingly against his cheek. As long as he kept it he had his golden girl. She had said it was a horrible shell, keeping her from her loved one. To him, it was a shining bridge spanning the gulf to shadowland, linking this world wherein he lived with the next world where dwelt his beloved.

Again he swung it out over the rail, holding it tightly with hands that would not let go. A while he gazed at it, this blue shell in which was his heart and his life. A while he caressed it, thinking of all it stood for.

Then he let it drop from limp, shaking fingers. Slowly it filled and sank from sight.

Some of the blue went from the sky. Some of the blue went from the sea. Oblivious to the staring, curious eyes about him, Wake Tyler put his shaking hands over his face — lowered his head till it rested on the hard wood of the deck rail. . . .

The picture made him quite famous.



A Ship Must Not Carry a Dead Body at Sea

IT HAS long been a superstition of sailors that a ship must not carry a dead body at sea. Partly for this reason, a death on the ocean is always hushed up and kept as quiet as possible. Even when the dead man is buried at sea, the body is generally given to the waves early in the morning, before the passengers, if there are any, are awake.

It is practically impossible to trace the origin of this feeling, which is said to apply even to the carrying of mummies thousands of years old. When ships carrying mummies from Egypt to other countries have been wrecked, this has been given as the cause. One old salt has explained it by saying that "a ship cannot abide to be made a bier of."

Many strange stories and superstitions hang around the idea of ships and dead men. One of the weirdest is a legend of the Brittany coast, which says that often, in the dead of night, the neighboring fishermen receive a silent summons from an unknown power. They are directed to launch their boats and ferry the spirits of those who were drowned at sea over to a sacred island in the "Bay of the Departed." Silent and awestruck, they obey, making their ghostly journey with their invisible load, but not a man of them will go near the island at any other time.

Von Karl twitched the revolver from her hand.

The Spy Master

*A SERIES**

By RICHARD WILMER ROWAN

IV. The Bandit Rendezvous

Von Karl's bitter enemy, Gregor Marcolos, sets a trap for him in Bucharest. And the mortality in Roumania is materially increased.

I

CONRAD VON KARL, we were later to learn, remained successfully concealed in Paris for more than a fortnight after the battle of the Marne. After our encounter with the pair of spies in that house of deep design on the *Boulevard Berthier*, and the subsequent action that momentous September 6th, when Diane, Benoit, and I and the English agent, Carruthers,

*The first of this series appeared in the November, 1927, number. Back issues will be sent anywhere in the United States on receipt of twenty-five cents each.

nearly trapped Von Karl in the room of the taxi chauffeur, Jean Perolle, we lost much of our effectiveness as pursuers, and the counter-espionage service lacked reserves to put upon the trail of the Spy Master. André Benoit had sprained his ankle and neglected it too long; my arm, injured in struggling with the Ganz woman at Du Parc's château on the 29th, had not been improved by the adventures and collisions of the 6th. It showed signs of infection, and the surgical treatments inflicted upon me—commanded, in fact, by Bertrand and Marin, my superiors—greatly confined my activities until the first week of October.

MEANWHILE, Benoit's ankle mending, he followed Marin and Diane Duplessis to Belfort, where a particularly ingenious system of enemy communication and espionage was thought to be rooted. Carruthers was called to Boulogne. I applied for transfer to Belfort, but Bertrand compromised by permitting me to assist him as a confidential clerk, in which capacity I found the dangers nil and the excitements vicarious. But my wounded arm healed, and I had many glimpses of the thrilling ramifications of the French secret service, while also enjoying unrivaled chances to learn from that genius, Bertrand, who seemed even a match for Conrad von Karl—if not in showmanship, at least in intellect, artistry of attack, and subtle daring.

So it was that I sat one day, decoding a hand-written despatch brought by courier from a trusted agent in Sofia. Bertrand was anxious to get it, and professed to rely upon my celerity with his private codes. And now, suddenly, the message leaped to engage my whole attention.

> Your man Ivan had vanished before I reached here. Kostoff has taken his place, the same Kostoff known to Mlle. Duplessis and the American. I know him now as a rogue and a cunning double-dealer. If you trust Kostoff and yet mistrust me, you are stupid beyond measure. I proceed to Bucharest alone. C. VON K.

And it was Von Karl's handwriting, too. I had thought it seemed vaguely familiar, and now my hasty comparisons with the few examples of his script Bertrand had on file convinced me of the warning's authenticity. Bertrand would, of course, know if his agent was named or known as Ivan. To me he was simply a service number: G 41.

"Ivan—yes," said my chief when I presented the exhibit with badly suppressed emotion. "Von Karl. And to Bucharest?"

"Alone," I put in.

"How characteristic of him to thrust that upon us!" said Bertrand. "As though we were casting him adrift impulsively. Alone," he repeated. "Why, Von Karl is probably invading the Roumanian capital with a private detachment of sharpshooters. He must know that his old enemy, Gregor Marcolos, whose yacht you saw him sink last winter, is now in Roumania—and very importantly connected, too, so we hear."

Bertrand's considerate use of "we" and "us" was not the least manifestation of his admirable leadership. From his agents he wished never to seem to withhold his confidence; for we—whether French or alien—were his eyes and his arms, he said, neither to be beckoned nor driven, but directed and wisely manipulated; and his finest achievements he tried to divide among us.

"And Bucharest—is that also significant?" I guessed.

"Very. We have just started a

secret mission——" He paused, but continued: "Von Karl wishes to show that he has learned its destination. Roumania and Italy, you see, are the two countries we hope to draw in on our side. The British are working chiefly upon Rome, and our concentration is in Bucharest. Germany and Austria, of course, will exert themselves, openly and secretly, to prevent any expansion of the *Entente*, while at the same time we know their efforts to have Turkey and Bulgaria declare against us and must copy in Stamboul and Sofia the game they play all around our Italian or Roumanian intrigue."

As ever, when speaking in strictest confidence, he was simplicity and candor personified. And in conclusion he said that within forty-eight hours, by separate routes, Diane and I should hasten to Bucharest.

II

IN THE evening, five days later—October 8th—I was to meet Diane Duplessis at the *Café Capsa;* and though the message I had from her upon arriving in the Roumanian capital was cautiously inexplicit, I gathered from it that Conrad von Karl, whom we sought, would be on view there in some guise at the dinner hour.

At quarter to eight I left my hotel and started to walk along the *Calea Victoriei*, that eccentric and characteristic principal street of Bucharest, so named in honor of the victory at Plevna. As I was nearing the café, I noticed a group of four, also moving in that direction, but slowly—a young woman and three men, who hindered their progress with dispute and gesticulation, yet somehow impressed me as of furtive or sinister intent. None of the four was at all familiar to me, and the probability of their connection with the international intrigue of the city seemed remote.

The girl and one man were in evening dress; but the other pair made no attempt to disguise a shabby vulgarity of garb, manner, and speech. Nor was the theme of their argument obscured by the distance I kept behind them or by my being unacquainted with the language. It seemed plain that the girl was rejecting the escort of her smartly dressed companion, and that the two shabby fellows were being won over to agreeing with her. While I watched them the controversy came to a bitter end, and the untidy pair led the ornate one across the avenue, leaving the girl to go on alone.

"*Monsieur*——"

She had reached the entrance to the café and stopped, and when I came up she spoke to me in French. It was her pathetic fate, she explained, to have an appointment with friends inside the café. But she might not enter there unescorted. If I would be so kind——

Of course I consented to supply the necessary escort; though not for a moment did I believe there was such a restriction in effect anywhere in Roumania. Moreover, it could have been suggested to her that a judicious tip would work wonders, either in announcing her to the friends, or in permitting her to enter and seek them. But the girl was dark and attractive, graceful, clever undoubtedly, and worth studying. We of the counter-espionage service were strictly enjoined against detours of knight errantry; yet I offered the pretty Roumanian my protection unconditionally.

It remained to be learned whether her friends would materialize. Diane had a table reserved, I knew; but

until this stranger manifested her real intentions, I decided to shepherd her to a remote and less desirable sector of the smart café. She decently declined to have me order anything for her, and seemed at pains to avoid even such coquetry as her alleged plight and dependence upon me would have warranted.

Suddenly she said that she believed she saw one of her friends. I rose; and she thanked me a bit nervously, I thought, and left me. I contrived to observe her, though the café was thronged and among many beautifully gowned and striking young women neither her appearance nor her behavior was conspicuous. I saw her speak for a moment to a waiter, who, it seemed to me, responded and gestured curtly; and she appeared to have been mistaken, for presently this strange guest of mine rejoined me at the obscure table, with a smile and an embarrassed shrug, and explained that she would have to impose upon me a few minutes longer.

These few minutes numbered exactly twelve, and then I saw Conrad von Karl entering the *Café Capsa.*

THE Spy Master was accompanied by a handsome young Roumanian officer, a major, resplendent in the dress uniform of a crack cavalry regiment. But the Von Karl splendors bedimmed every other costume in that brilliant gathering of masculine pomp and feminine display; and it occurred to me that he dressed upon geographical impulse, taking greater liberties as he approached the Orient, where sartorial magnificence always counted most.

Above that swarthy countenance, which even from a distance was distinguished by glowing eyes, arrogant nose, and strong chin, there was the celebrated green turban with its great emerald—that almost notorious jewel, a cunning imitation of which he had used in effecting our timely escape from Du Parc's château. He wore an ambassador's dress coat of blue embroidered in silver. His white waistcoat was embroidered in gold; he wore black satin knee breeches with flashing diamond buckles, white silk stockings, and patent leather pumps. And at my first glimpse of this superb entrance he was in the act of removing a white cloak lined with scarlet.

Diners were everywhere turning and craning and staring at such a towering show. Indeed, Von Karl's bulk and bearing, his dark face and majestic mannerism, would have deserved an audience even though he had affected the most moderate raiment. But one glance appeared to overcome my companion, whose name and purpose at the café I as yet did not know; and I heard her exclaim softly to herself. When I looked away from Von Karl and at her I found her pale and evidently excited.

"Who is that man, do you know, *Ma'm'selle?*" I asked in what I hoped was a casual tone. "The Moslem——"

If her uncommon behavior related in some way to Conrad von Karl, then here was a mystery upon which I had stumbled with boundless luck.

"He is—I think—the Turkish ambassador, *Monsieur,*" she answered gravely. And then she exclaimed anew: "But—ah—there are my friends! Adieu!"

Her haste, her eagerness verging upon panic, was of less interest than her destination. Von Karl,

with the Roumanian major, was being conducted to a prominent table. And this girl who had made use of me, and whose altercation on the street with three companions I had chanced to witness, was now plainly proceeding from my table to Conrad von Karl's.

Her evening wrap of green and silver brocade she had not removed. I was already starting to follow her when I saw one hand steal forth from underneath her cloak; and I saw, too, that it held a small revolver. If she meant to shoot von Karl, my warning shout now would never save him. Yet I hurried between the tables as best I could, and I was not ten paces from her when, turning suddenly and confronting the officer who was Von Karl's companion, she raised the weapon and fired it twice, point-blank.

INSTANTLY the restaurant was in an uproar. It seemed that the handsome young major must have been mortally hit. But Von Karl, with magnificent poise and audacity, stood up.

"*Morituri te salutamus!*" he chose to exclaim, like an ancient Roman gladiator.

His only available shield or weapon was a napkin, but this he whirled open before the assassin's face and then suddenly enveloped her head with it. And as she struggled to throw off the blinding mask, Von Karl twitched the revolver from her hand.

Then his companion sprang up—unhurt—and others from neighboring tables crowded around them. I was now close to Von Karl myself, but his back was toward me; and in that press of patrons and waiters gathering about the Spy Master I saw one, a waiter, who was drawing from beneath his black jacket a revolver of much heavier calibre than the girl had fired. This man, at a distance of less than three yards, was taking careful aim at Conrad von Karl.

None save myself appeared to notice him; and I had hardly an instant for reflecting upon his murderous intent. I did again what Von Karl had done, on impulse and with a fortunate accuracy. I snatched up a glass of champagne from the table nearest to hand and flung it, wine and slender goblet speeding together — clipping the waiter on the chin, the glass breaking and gashing him there and the champagne flowing upon the bosom of his shirt.

With an oath he turned and saw me, his unexpected antagonist. His chin was bleeding, and his eyes were clouded with fury. He tilted his weapon and shot at me; and before he was buried underneath a veritable football scrimmage of angry men he fired again. His first bullet fanned my cheek, and the second seared it. I had no extra missiles ready, or time enough to think of hurling them. I simply stood still in the midst of a frantic scene and watched my defenders subdue the frustrated assassin.

BUT this prodigious commotion diverted most of us from the waiter's accomplice, the girl who wore the green and silver cloak and who had used me to enter the famous Roumanian café. And she had seized her opportunity and fled toward the entrance, only to be apprehended there because of the alertness of another of her sex. Diane Duplessis, it turned out, had followed Von Karl to the *Café Capsa* and had seen him seated and seen the girl in green and silver attempt to shoot the young major,

his companion. And Diane, as quick as a cat, had recognized this original assailant and had headed her off until effectually relieved of that duty by café attendants and gendarmes.

Von Karl's companion, evidently a person of importance, seemed to consider himself tremendously affronted; and I was studying the vigorous methods of the Roumanian police in handling him whose aim I had spoiled, when a solicitous head waiter called my attention to the blood that stained my face and was spreading upon my evening clothes: Taken to a private room of the café, which appeared to have been furnished for livelier entertainment, I waited until an army surgeon was brought in to attend to my wound. Here Diane found me, and she brought a verbal message from Von Karl, who had heard it was I who had saved his life.

He said he intended seeing us both later that evening, provided that my hurt was not severe. The Roumanian doctor agreed to my own verdict, that the wound was superficial; but he romantically assumed that Diane was my sweetheart, and warned me that I should probably have to wear the scar for many a day.

"Tell Von Karl I am at his disposal," I said to her when the doctor had finished with me.

"Not at all—he shall come to you," she ordered, insisting further that I drive to my hotel and go to bed.

"When he is ready to consult us," she added, "I shall bring him to your room. You may not wish to, but we are going to make much of your scratch, as you call it. You saved him, and he shall repay France for your priceless services."

II

I DID not undress, but was lying on the bed with the light dimmed when, at about 11:30, there came a peremptory knocking on my door. I called out and was answered curtly in Roumanian. Whereupon, growing suspicious, I declined to admit unidentified visitors, but sprang up, alert, to listen.

Then came a hoarse whispering, and I thought I also heard a grim chuckle, followed at once by that unmistakable metallic sound of keys jingling in a bunch, one against another. I straightway turned off what light I had and fumbled in my bag for a service automatic I had managed to bring over the frontier.

But the key was turning in my lock, the door was opening, and an electric torch flashed its blinding white light upon me as I stood irresolute. In German and then in French I was gruffly commanded to stop hunting a weapon and put up my hands. I did so, feeling much more foolish than intimidated, though reason enough I had to be afraid, as one of the invaders was that arch-rogue, Gregor Marcolos. Their light protected them, yet I could tell that three men entered my room, closing and locking the door, and that one of this trio was a wheezy fat man, Marcolos, of familiar voice, last heard by me when he pleaded and cursed as Von Karl was condemning him aboard his own yacht, the *Achilles*.

Von Karl had sunk the yacht, but Marcolos had contrived to escape from that trap which the Spy Master had baited for him. It seemed clear to me now that both the girl and the waiter at the *Café Capsa* had been agents of the vengeful Levantine. Marcolos had failed to

assassinate Von Karl that evening largely because of me; but now here was I the helpless prisoner of Marcolos.

It was my hope to parley and temporize until Von Karl and Diane might appear. Yet even this simple stratagem was beyond me, for the fat Marcolos, holding the light, directed his pair of rascals in a strange dialect and ignored my attempts to engage him in delaying conversation.

THEY proceeded briskly to bind me with heavy rope, round and round, as if I were a bale or a cask to be lowered into the hold of a ship. And when I could no longer walk or stand erect, they lifted me and tossed me upon my own bed, where I lay face down and listening. Marcolos, I could tell, was going through my luggage; but I had anticipated a visit from German spies or the local police, and had left nothing to be found which might prove me other than the American journalist and traveler my passport pretended.

I heard the fat rogue grunt his disgust. No doubt the job of searching was an effort to him, yet one he would not have dared entrust to any accomplice. And now the three of them began murmuring together, flashing the electric torch here and there about my room, with what purpose I could not fathom, until they commenced to speak in German. Then I quickly understood that Marcolos proposed to torture and kill me and leave me gruesomely disposed as a threat to be appreciated by Conrad von Karl.

The value of my life was their least consideration, and my feelings —which I need not attempt to describe — were of interest only as an object of pitiless ridicule. So anxious were they that I should miss nothing of their dispute which was to decide the manner of my death, that they changed to French, which Marcolos spoke well enough but his comrades very brokenly; and thus I gathered that the Levantine favored unspeakable cruelties while yielding to a demand for haste, which seemed to recommend an ordinary hanging as the quickest but no less terrible warning to Von Karl. I had not been gagged, yet I could only assume that they were inviting me to cry out and provide them earlier excuse for slitting my throat. Now, however, my case was desperate, and I resorted to a variety of offers and blandishments, in German and French, endeavoring to divide them and prolong their ghastly discussion while my own thoughts raced to invent a rescue or uncover some fleeting resource. If Von Karl should appear——

The fat Marcolos interrupted, shining his light into my dazzled eyes, and then striking me in the face, tearing off the bandage where the bullet had grazed my cheek. A volley of his guttural abuse informed me of another grievance he had, greater by far than anything I provoked that evening at the *Café Capsa*: it was my speedboat, he reminded me, which had enabled Von Karl more swiftly to mature his plan aboard the *Achilles*, and on the very day which he, Gregor Marcolos, had appointed to be Von Karl's last. I should be well punished for such untimely frustrations! American swine of a meddler!

Enraging himself, he snarled and spat and was a dreadful specimen of bestial malignity. When I closed my eyes, to shut out the light, he struck me again, commanding my solemn attention. And then, when

he had repeated and elaborated his filthy discourse, he told them to carry me over to the window, from which I was to be suspended by the neck.

The two less corpulent ruffians picked me up, like the log their ropes made me; but almost at once they were startled and dropped me, and I fell half off the bed, my head striking the floor. I was dazed for a moment, but never lost consciousness. I could tell that another of the gang had arrived in haste. Judging by the quantity of their questions, I guessed that the alarm was something rather vague. Von Karl? I was straining to hear them use the Spy Master's name, which must sound familiar in the midst of all this frantic gabble of strange dialects. But now Marcolos began to give orders, and my own case no longer mattered to any of them, and presently—for no reason apparent to me—their panic grew and all four of them fled from my room.

I WRIGGLED helplessly until my legs slid off the bed with a thump, and I lay on my side on the floor, still bound with a sickening pressure and thoroughness. Being ungagged, I might have shouted for help till I roused the whole hotel. But I could not yet be certain how far away Marcolos and his men had posted themselves, and my shouting would profit me little enough if it drew Diane and Von Karl into some deadly ambush. So there I remained, with my danger hardly diminished, fearing to cry out, unable to reconnoitre. In about five minutes I heard a step in the hall, and my room door was opened very stealthily. Being disposed to believe that this was no friend but a foe returning to dispatch me, I gathered my strength—not to struggle, but to roll, and roll I did quickly and quietly and vanished underneath the bed.

No sooner had I reached my ultimate position close against the wall than a bright circle on the floor near the door showed that the intruder used a torch much less powerful than the one Marcolos had brought to bear upon me. But if it were directed under the bed it must surely reveal my improvised hiding-place. And there was nothing more I could do to save myself from being shot or stabbed. The feet of the intruder, when I descried them, were not reassuring; yet his aimless manner of seeking me, his evident perplexity over my disappearance, bespoke dull wits and made me a little more confident.

There! I heard him grunt. The light winked and jerked along the bedside. At last my possible resource had occurred to him, and as I watched his feet I could follow his movement of bending and then kneeling down.

It seemed unlikely that he would risk the commotion of shooting me. And to stab me he, too, must crawl under the bed—a horrid business. But the man whose face now descended grotesquely almost to the level of the floor and who was peering at me with those small, wicked eyes, had been designed for just such business. Swart and cunning that face, the body not large, the shoulders broad and muscular; evil and relishing his own debased advantages in this, he did not waste a moment after his discovery, but with a long knife ready in one hand and the light shining from the other, he flattened himself and then began wriggling, serpentine and venomous, toward the goal which was my defenseless self.

But even as he came on deliber-

ately, his hand with the light moved as he moved and spread its radiance along the floor—there—beyond the bed. And I saw a sudden flash, and knew what it was—an immaculate patent leather boot and another, entering—already inside my room.

"Take care! Go back!" I ordered my adversary in English, not minding how he understood it, but wanting my voice identified, my plight made known to the newcomer.

PRETTY slippers followed the patent boots. Von Karl and Diane had come. The man with the knife and small electric torch had been surprised by my sharp command and was puzzled by my English. He hesitated—a spasm of dread, a curious wince of pain, swept over his ugly features. Then his light faded, glowing for another moment, and went out. He sighed and did not move again.

I tried rolling forward, but was too numb now for an agile effort. Von Karl dragged the other aside, and then he and Diane stooped and pulled me out and hurriedly unbound me. In a few words I described my encounter with Marcolos and his intention concerning me. We might still be outnumbered; I urged them both to be on their guard.

"Marcolos," said Von Karl, "had five men with him when he reached this hotel. My agents got two, but a third escaped, and that was the warning you heard brought to the greasy Gregor. I must confess, my good friend," he went on, "I overlooked your possible danger, thinking their trap here was but clumsily set for me. As they fled, my men got two more—and this is the fifth." He touched the prone bandit with his foot. "Marcolos somehow slipped away."

He still wore his jeweled turban, but otherwise had changed to conventional evening dress. Above his right eye the muscular twitching suggested his distaste for this private conflict. The fat Levantine mongrel should have been exterminated long ago!

"Did you stab him?" I asked, pointing to the stricken rogue at our feet.

"Only with this," said Von Karl, and he held up a large hypodermic syringe. "I thought I might want to question him, in case you had been hurt."

"He might help you locate Marcolos," said Diane, "and end this duel, once and for all."

"I have another and surer way of finding the fat dog," Von Karl replied. "It will not be necessary to disturb the dreams of this killer."

The curious coiling scar on his cheek was livid; even the sight of one of the poor tools of Gregor Marcolos seemed to inflame him.

Diane said my own cheek was bleeding, where the bandage had been roughly removed. I must lie down, she declared, and let her bathe and disinfect it against dust rubbed into the wound while I suffered in my bonds upon the floor.

Von Karl briskly crossed to the window, from which I had nearly dangled on a halter, and raised it, admitting a welcome draft of cool night air.

"First," he said, "we must disinfect the room."

He bent with strength and grace and lifted up the unconscious man, sent back by Marcolos to end my captivity. He carried him to the window, braced there a moment, and then hurled forth my recent adversary, who must meet with a certain justice on the stones of the courtyard many feet below.

III

FOR two days I remained in my room, frequently visited by the solicitous Diane and twice by Conrad von Karl, and always guarded by one or another of his trusted aids—good fellows, willing as valets, but heavily armed and as eager for a fight. The wound on my cheek had healed to a disagreeable stiffness by the third day; and in the afternoon my attendance was required at the trial of the girl and the waiter who had done the shooting at the *Café Capsa*.

Von Karl explained that the pair would be charged with attempting to murder the young major who had been his companion.

"The girl's pistol—you remember that I grabbed it," said he—"was loaded with blank cartridges."

"How absurd!" Diane exclaimed.

"Not at all. Marcolos, in battling with me, has always strained himself to invent such humorous subtleties. I, you see, am the great and crafty Spy Master. He wishes to outwit me—and so he grows comically complicated."

"I am proof that waiter's revolver fired no blanks," I said, touching the plaster on my face.

"The girl was merely a dramatic diversion. She was intended, I judge, to demonstrate that one may not be safe in my company," said Von Karl. "Major Stirbey is very influentially connected in Roumania. I was to have been shot down from behind, while he seemed to escape by a miracle. If I survived, I would ever after have been shunned in public; while if I died, some proof of treachery could have been fastened upon me. And in either event it was to be added to the weight of argument in certain high circles, keeping Roumania hospitable to pro-German sentiment."

"Then you are supposed to be on our side here?"

Diane's inquiry made him laugh, as she often could.

"Perhaps I am too big for one side on all fronts," he blandly replied.

"I think," said she, "you intend exactly to fit the winning side, when you are sure which it is."

And his answer, if not angry, was strangely grave.

"With these hands," he said, and his finger-nails with their usual blue-green polish glistened as he gestured with virulent emphasis, "I shall soon play upon the windpipe of Marcolos. He has information, I am told, which should help us to determine the winning side."

AFTER this he maintained a steadfast and inscrutable silence as we rode to the court where two of the Levantine's agents were facing prison. My own testimony at their trial required exactly seven minutes, and I was not cross-examined. Of course, I remained with Diane throughout the farcical proceedings, amused at least by the candid informality with which Balkan legal machinery railroaded the pair to their doom. The alleged waiter looked as much of a criminal as the other who, drugged and insensible, had been flung to his death from my hotel window; and I did not pity either of them. But the dark and attractive young woman seemed forlorn, indeed. She had been entirely ignored by her confederates on the outside, it appeared, since she still wore the evening gown and cloak which had been new and becoming when she appealed to me to escort her into the smart café. Now her garments hardly recommended the conditions of Roumanian jails. She tried to affect a brave indifference both to the stares of the courtroom

and the certainty of outcome for her; and never once did she glance toward me or in any degree acknowledge my attempt, in testifying, to obscure the obvious premeditation of her deed as an accessory.

Virtually no defense was entered in behalf of either culprit, yet it did not seem that they pleaded guilty. Conrad von Karl, surely a chief witness, was not called upon; and my own evidence, delivered in English and French to a bored interpreter, lost so much weight as to become almost immaterial. A cloud of minor Roumanian witnesses described the offenses of the pair against the public order, and in due course the judge curtly sentenced them to eight and ten years of penal servitude respectively.

THIS, Von Karl announced as we returned to the hotel, was a favorable beginning.

"Can they appeal?" I asked.

"Marcolos has undoubtedly promised to get them out of prison. But I shall have something to say about that," said the Spy Master. "They have suffered for him and are now ripe to change sides. I shall take them promptly from their cells and use them to find him at his real headquarters."

"You intend bribery?"

"In Roumania, to be sure," he said. "Have you heard that there is at least one prison in this counry from which the convicts go home for visits of two or three days? It is authentic—and no glass emeralds can I pass off this time. Here the bribe is measured as an art."

As soon as we could consult alone together, Diane and I agreed we had better wire to Marin in Paris for further instructions. *Entente* diplomacy was bending all its skill to the effort that would one day bring Roumanian divisions to the Transylvanian front. Von Karl, however, expected us to help him flout the law of Roumania rather openly, and he could easily prove us to be French agents. Were we parading into a trap of far-reaching consequences? Justice in this country, if not tempered with mercy toward the weak, was assuredly administered in accord with the desires of the rich and strong. The Roumanian major whose complaint had sent the pair to prison was of an influential position in the kingdom already far surpassing his military rank; and how might France suffer if we conspired to liberate his assailants?

A difficult code report contrived to convey our whole situation to Marin and his chief, Bertrand. The latter's personal reply instructed us to stick to Conrad von Karl at all costs.

"If caught in this," Diane observed with a shrug, "we shall, of course, be deserted and repudiated."

"That is always understood," I replied.

"No wonder, as Von Karl says, the professional or non-patriot spy so readily changes sides," she pursued.

"Von Karl spares himself that evolution," I said, "by facing in every direction, whether our backs are turned or not."

Yet we were agreed that in this war upon Gregor Marcolos the changeless purpose of the Spy Master could be relied upon.

IV

TWO days later, in the evening, Von Karl abruptly notified us that the moment had come. Taking his advice, we dressed ourselves warmly, as we expected to motor far from Bucharest and possibly be

out all night; and when he appeared it was in Alpine apparel, the green turban and usual regalia having vanished in favor of wool cap, knickers, and leather jacket, heavy sweater and gloves, and the rest of the mountain-climber's outfit. Diane, who could not be dissuaded from the expedition, was somewhat similarly clad, and looked like a resolute boy. At nine we started in the car the Spy Master had ordered, a well-favored Panhard of furiously noisy chain-drive.

Setting forth with no more stealth than a circus parade, we were soon traveling so swiftly there seemed small danger of our being followed or overtaken. And our driver, who in one hasty glimpse had looked to me like a tough young bandit, was by Von Karl pronounced both tried and trustworthy.

"Don't worry about Petri—I've used him before," he explained, his lips close to my ear. "He cannot fail me. I am keeping half of his family out of jail."

Here was the whole Von Karl philosophy of human reliance: only those securely in his power did he depend upon. Reflecting on this as we sped along strange and rutted roads, I set to wondering if he also counted Diane and me satisfactorily entoiled? We had ridden for more than an hour and a half when the car suddenly slowed down and turned off into a narrower and barely visible path.

"We are almost there now," said Von Karl, "and here is our story, my friends. On behalf of a sentimental and rich Americano I have arranged that the girl of the café demonstration shall be set free. Take this." He put into my hand a thick envelope, stuffed as I could guess with a large sum of money. "You are personally giving the bribe. The man who was a waiter means nothing to us. A numskull, resigned to his fate! But the girl, who calls herself Helene Leru, will become a useful agent of my staff. She served Marcolos only to get her brother out of prison. I am having the brother liberated with her—by mistake—in place of the supposed waiter. And her gratitude and responsibility should do the rest."

"Why was the brother imprisoned?" Diane asked.

"He got himself foolishly mixed up with a gypsy girl who involved him in some crime. I suspect that she was one of a gang of bandits with whom Marcolos is himself closely allied. Indeed, the timid, cruel, and oily Gregor intends to collect a large band of cutthroats and to use them to terrorize all this vicinity, where *Entente* sympathizers are in the large majority."

"But surely," said I, "the government in Bucharest will take a hand in such aggressions?"

"Wait and you shall see," he gaily predicted.

THE side road that we were now following sucked at the wheels of our car like a morass; yet the Panhard plowed along like some emerging monster of the ooze. I thought I saw a lantern flash—and then again, and I was sure of it. We began ascending a gentle slope, and the ground seemed dry and firm. Again the lantern—and a low whistle.

Von Karl replied as softly, and our car stopped. Boldly a man stepped out into the glare of our headlights, identifying himself. He wore an officer's uniform overcoat, boots, and kepi. In his left hand he held ready a service revolver,

while with the right he shaded his eyes.

"Hand him the envelope. Speak nothing but English," Von Karl directed me.

I got out of the Panhard, walking around until I too stood revealed in the glare of the lamps.

"If you please, sir," I said, and with no other word offered a bribe to an officer of the king.

Von Karl, I knew, had followed me, but stood back in the shadow, while the other accepted the envelope, opened it, and with deft fingers began counting over the amount he had been paid. Twice he counted the money, and then exploded, violently protesting, profanely and in several different languages.

"He claims there is a thousand francs missing," Von Karl interpreted to me. "Have you a thousand to spare as a loan?" he added, whispering. "We cannot afford to argue here. And I am nearly cleaned out—with other expenses likely before we get to a banking house."

I had with me the necessary amount, and I handed it over. Evidently I was to be charged for a front seat at this peculiar show. Moreover, the inference that I had subtracted a thousand francs from the envelope entrusted to me was so maddening and unmistakable, I wanted to give that sneering officer another thousand for his revolver and then use it to make him and Von Karl admit their error.

But the ever-composed Von Karl said quietly: "I can attend to all the rest of it now. Please wait for me in the car with *Ma'm'selle*."

So I rejoined Diane and sat beside her, and she gave my hand a little pressure to indicate her understanding of the money transaction. We watched and we listened; but neither the Spy Master nor the bribe-taking officer stood forth in the sector of light, and their voices—if combative now and then and crisp with authority—were too muffled and far off to be distinct in our hearing.

THEN the controversy ended. Von Karl and the officer crossed the path of brilliant exposure, and came to the car. The officer sat in front with Petri, while our leader took his place again between Diane and me. He spoke a few words to the chauffeur, and the Panhard started with its throb and growl, returning to the main road as we had come from it—now downhill slowly, then along the sodden track which suggested the rim of a swamp. But we did not swing off in the direction of Bucharest.

Westward lay our new destination, and after half an hour, by a devious route and with infernal jolting, we arrived before an inn of such rural simplicity as was altogether strange to me. When the Roman legions defended the Dacian marches it must have been just like this; and it looked so old, so without accommodation, so innocent of all conveniences, I could not wonder that we found it deserted.

However, Conrad von Karl gave an order, and Petri climbed out and began to shout and knock and clamor for attention from those within; and at last an elderly couple did materialize, frantically apologetic and professing much remorse that any lordly guests should find them unready at this hour. It struck me as curious that they should be here at all, and fully dressed. They made dim and aged lanterns to glow, and we were eagerly invited to enter. But now

the alert Petri called Von Karl's attention to the lights of another car which rolled slowly toward the inn from the direction opposite to that by which we had come.

"They are on time, then," said the Spy Master. He consulted the Roumanian officer, who seemed to agree that all omens were favorable. "The soldiers should follow soon," he added.

"Soldiers?"

"Yes, Roumanian infantry," said Von Karl to Diane and me, aside. "Marcolos, you see, is coming here at dawn, having an appointment also to buy the release of my would-be assassins. But I outguessed and outbid him, as you Americans put it. When he comes, doubtless with a body of his ruffians, he will collide with the soldiers. I shall present proofs of his subversive intent—of his leading an armed force for political purposes. There may be bloodshed. But public opinion will be stirred by what must seem to be the rash and insolent plotting of a German mercenary. Marcolos will be fortunate if he perishes in the skirmish."

Neither Diane nor I chose to comment, being accustomed to the ruthlessness of his strategy.

"But then — there come your soldiers in motor cars!" she exclaimed. And she pointed out to us the headlights a mile away.

"Precisely," said Von Karl. "With money one can get splendid results in this kingdom."

THE first automobile had now arrived before the inn and stopped close to our Panhard. Two men and a woman got out, and as they approached us and Conrad von Karl flashed an electric torch upon them, I recognized the girl who had sought my escort in penetrating the fashionable café.

And now she seemed suddenly to recognize me.

"*Monsieur!*" Her surprise was flattering, but as it mingled with an inexplicable horror my bewilderment grew. Why did she deplore my presence at the scene of her ransoming? She ignored Diane in her boyish disguise, and, taking my arm, drew me anxiously aside. "You have twice befriended me, *Monsieur*," she said. "Once in helping me into the café, when I might have had to go there with a man I despise. He had dressed to take me——" I recalled that first episode of our acquaintance. "And at my trial," she hurried on, "you were kind and tried to make it easier for me, though no one had appealed to you. So now, *Monsieur Americain*, I repay. It is great risk—a trap. Those cars that you see coming on——"

"Soldiers," said I. "It was arranged."

"The soldiers have been led astray. Those cars, *Monsieur*, bring men who will kill you—as they nearly did at your hotel. In jail though I was, you see I heard about that. Marcolos and his bandits come in those cars!" she cried. "Please, *Monsieur*, there is time—run away at once, take cover, hide—please, the night will conceal you—"

Von Karl, the observant, had noted her excitement, and I knew he had stolen close up beside me, hearing all of her final urgent appeal. Quickly he stepped around me and his hand fastened claw-like upon the wrist of the girl whom he called Helene Leru.

"How are you so sure of this?" he demanded.

"It is certain," said she, in terror

of his dark and merciless face confronting her. "See—see there!"

She pointed to the car in which she had come. The Roumanian officer we had paid and one of her two male companions were leaping into it with manifest panic. Their flight was prompt and unashamed.

"But one remains," said Von Karl.

"Yes, my brother. He stays with me," she retorted proudly.

And then Von Karl flashed his light upon a pale youth, showing the effects of his imprisonment, who disdained to abandon her who had risked so much to save him from his folly. In the strong glare he blinked, but then saluted us like a soldier, and I saw in him the making of a new man.

"Into our car, everybody!" the Spy Master decided. "Petri!"

That active driver sprang to prepare the Panhard for a desperate run.

Almost over our heads, it seemed, a rifle cracked. Petri, in the dim lantern light, appeared to lengthen, and then he spun around and fell over the wheel he had controlled that night so expertly. He was dead—picked off by a rifleman concealed in the loft of the inn. The car was covered, and we dared not try to rush it. Moreover, the brazenly flaring lamps of Marcolos' oncoming motors showed how soon they would be upon us.

"Into the inn!" shouted Von Karl. "We'll need that rifle."

And when we hesitated he swore at us, so that none chose to dispute his leadership—our peril was too acute and his daring too clearly a requisite of safety.

"Into the inn!" he repeated, and Helene and her brother, Diane and I, followed him into that dubious refuge.

V

OF COURSE we found that the elderly couple had fled.

"Put out all the lanterns," said Von Karl.

This we did, and tried as best we could quickly to fortify door and windows.

The principal room of the inn was some twenty feet by thirty, with a lofty timbered ceiling, a towering fireplace, whose incipient blaze we had to scatter; with four windows and three doors, with two heavy wooden tables, wood benches and stools. Two of the doors led to the rear of the antiquated building, and Von Karl—who seemed to know the interior well—said that one of them would enable him to reach the ladder which ascended to the loft. He elected to go alone to smoke out that sharp-shooter overhead, whose weapon he coveted and whose presence already had cost us much.

Dressed for mountain climbing, he had this night run upon obstacles which were super-Himalayan; and his coolness was a tonic and an admirable thing to observe. A few spears of moonlight came thrusting through the aged shutters we had not been able perfectly to bar, so that I could see his swarthy countenance as he stole off to his duel—the eyebrow twitching faintly, the livid and coiling reptilian scar, lips and eyes murderous, grim, proclaiming no quarter, expressing a sanguinary lust.

"He cannot think of being beaten," Diane commented to me in a whisper.

There the four of us waited alertly, listening. I knew he counted me his second in command; yet I wished I had insisted upon going with him. Suddenly a shot—and then two more! In a very few moments the door he had passed

through swung open again. With my automatic ready I stood in the deepest shadow, but the precaution was unnecessary. It was Von Karl who came back to us.

"See here, my friends!" He held up the precious rifle, an old Lee-Metford, and a belt heavy with ammunition. Moreover, he had taken a sword bayonet of Italian make and an Austrian pistol which was brand new and suggested the backing Marcolos and his rogues prospered upon.

"Why are you being so loyal to us?" he questioned the brother and sister, before offering them arms.

"Perhaps we can help you," said Helene Leru. "But we are of no value to Gregor Marcolos—only in his way. I happen to have learned too much. It would be madness to trust him, *Monsieur*, if we must take sides."

"It is too late to be neutral," Von Karl replied. "If we get clear of this, I promise you both shall see Paris, and I'll make you rich. Let Marcolos suppose he has sprung my own trap upon me here. I shall not need any soldiers if I have enough rifle ammunition."

DIANE and I had pistols, so he gave Leru the Austrian one and allowed Helene to carry the sword bayonet and his cartridge belt. Opening the heavy front door a crack, he prepared to open fire with the rifle as the cars loaded with the bandits came to a halt some two hundred yards from the inn, before which our Panhard stood with its engine throbbing and a driver slack upon the steering wheel. Taking aim deliberately, Von Karl emptied the rifle, and drew a belated, spattering fire in return. Helene helped him reload, while Diane and I barred the door again. To me it appeared, after one glimpse of our numerous adversaries, that we could scarcely do worse than attempt to stand siege here in a venerable sieve, and I said so.

"Exactly," Von Karl saluted my protest. "Other plans also commend themselves to me. They will be spreading out to surround us. Yes"—he had the door ajar once more and peered forth—"that is what I expected. Marcolos is himself no lion, and the types he has enlisted will never risk their own lives in the dark for a cowardly tub of rancid lard. At dawn, if we wait for it, they will draw in to take us by storm. Or perhaps Marcolos wishes a ransom—he is so infernally greedy. He would sell his revenge." Since the enemy encircled us it was necessary for our little garrison to cover all approaches, and, leaving Diane and Helene with me, Von Karl took Leru—whom he probably did not trust—into the rear of the building, where an adjacent dilapidated stable offered some shelter for a rushing attack. We three in the front were undisturbed, but from time to time we heard the Spy Master's rifle warning scouts and prowlers.

Then he abruptly rejoined us, bringing Leru. "I have picked off several," he boasted, "and they are through with the job till dawn. Do you see them?"

He boldly swung the door wide and showed us their twinkling distant campfires, a far flung ring enclosing us and yet holding off from his merciless marksmanship.

"The fires," said Diane, "not only serve to inform us of our hopeless blockade, but also screen them and warm them. You notice how they keep to the other side of each fire and offer you no silhouette targets."

"That condition I intend to correct," Von Karl said mysteriously.

"We are leaving our feeble fort. Bring all weapons. Down on your knees and creep after me."

THUS we evacuated the ancient inn. In No Man's Land between the lines on two broad fronts that night were spies and scouts and patrols crawling and dodging, taking cover and lying prone and breathless, just as we did as we followed our audacious captain. But the soldiers who crept and squirmed between the entrenched battle lines had each of them his objective of duty, and each his chance to turn back when that duty should be discharged; while we, it seemed, went forth because we dared not wait for the battle to be brought to us, went forward because retreating was impossible. We had no advantage over the men of the trenches, save that Marcolos used neither rockets nor flares nor artillery. But again, Marcolos commanded wolves unlikely to care about taking prisoners—unless the two women——

Conrad von Karl led with proficient stealth, until we had traversed slowly and awkwardly an uneven fifty metres. Then he selected for us a hollow protected by bushes, told us to keep quiet and wait for him, no matter how long—and disappeared, going on alone.

Suspecting his intention, I endeavored to see him in progress toward the bright ring of the bandit's fires. But Diane urged that I obey, and wait as he directed, quietly and patiently. He had left me the captured rifle, and I had to console myself with it—alternately sitting or crouching, the weapon ready; and after a silent, nerve-shaking hour and a quarter, he came back to us with a new rifle strapped to his back.

"No discipline, as I anticipated," he whispered. "I found a fire with three men at it, two of them sleeping."

"We heard no outcry," Diane said significantly.

"First the hypodermic, then the bayonet," he said. "But come now—we are going to occupy that post on the slope." And he led us forward again, very carefully, with much listening and many painful, anxious waits.

We had to crawl uphill, and as the fires were not far apart I did not see how he expected our party to break through the bandits' cordon and survive. However, when we drew near the rim of light he disclosed his further plan: Leru and I were to worm our way up close to the fire and sit there, exposed, replacing the dead men. Leru, having been involved with some of these very rascals, would be able to answer discreetly if any one called to us or passed on a command. Diane and Helene were to lie out in the shadow, but to be ready to shoot and aid us if we were detected and attacked.

VON KARL waited only to see us start on our dangerous short journey to the fire, and then he turned back to the inn. Leru and I took no chances unnecessarily; our slow progress was a torment, but we avoided detection. At last he ventured to stand up; he stretched and then stirred up the fire. When he sat down we crawled close beside him. We found two rifles ready for us; and the Spy Master had even disposed his three victims so that they looked to be comfortably sleeping.

Before he rejoined us, though his final excursion was quickly contrived, we understood Von Karl's errand—he had gone back into the

inn and set it on fire. And the flames were visible as he came running up, and all around us the surprised besiegers were shouting and bestirring themselves.

Von Karl did not hesitate to add his voice to this clamor. He shepherded Diane and the Leru girl past our fire and further on into the shadow behind it. Diane had a rifle now, and Von Karl spread us out according to his final stratagem. Thinking that we had fired the inn to cover some attempted sortie, Marcolos and his numerous gang would close in to meet it. And so they would put themselves at last between a flaming background and his deadly rifle.

Our signal was simply Von Karl's own first shot. I think thereafter he did most of the killing; but he kept Leru and Diane and me on the move, so that we would seem a more considerable band of attackers.

"See the rats run!" he shouted, kneeling and firing again, till there was no target left him for more than half-way around the flaming inn. "They might rally. We had better rush for the car. Its engine has been running. There will not be much petrol left."

He led us straight to the Panhard. A bullet or two whined close to us. They were rallying! Wounded and slain were not far off. Von Karl gathered up more rifles and ammunition, and his bayonet had other work to do ruthlessly. Meanwhile, Diane found that even the tires had been left undamaged; they had been that certain of our extermination—or perhaps too afraid of the rifle fire from the inn, in which we had seemed to be trapped.

Very tenderly Leru and his sister and I lifted the body of the chauffeur, Petri, and placed it on the floor of the tonneau. Diane was to drive, with Helene crouching low beside her; while Von Karl, Leru, and I knelt with our rifles on the rear seat, as if behind a parapet, and endeavored to discourage pursuit.

But there was no organized pursuit, and it seemed that our rush down to the car, when we had been expected to charge out of the burning inn, had completely outwitted Marcolos' imperfect generalship. Away we sped, Von Karl emptying one rifle from sheer bravado. Diane, short of fuel, nursed the car ahead most skilfully, running over strange roads, and without headlights.

RELAXED after the great excitement, aching in the memory of the distances we had crept and wriggled up that slope to the bandits' fire, we were glad to stop at dawn, discard our larger weapons, cover poor Petri with a robe, and then try to head toward a village where enough fuel might be had for our run back to Bucharest.

"I have not forgotten. I owe you a thousand francs," said Conrad von Karl. And he paid me at once an equivalent in Roumanian currency, the notes showing many a dark, rusty-looking stain.

Like a hero, possessed of genius as well as amazing fortitude and dash, had he conducted himself throughout our treacherous ordeal. Yet with such courage and such wit and resource, a taint endured in him. I examined the money he paid me and knew he had stopped to plunder the slain.

Another "Spy Master" story—"THE MUFFLED VOLLEY"—*will appear in the March*, 1928, *issue of* MYSTERY STORIES.

The Crack in the Church Door

By ARTHUR F. HARRIS

DO YOU know how came the crack in the church door of the Cathedral of Aix-la-Chapelle? Well, the story is that eleven hundred years ago, while the cathedral was being built, the religious and secular authorities of the town found themselves out of funds, and there seemed no way of raising more money to carry the work forward.

While they were discussing the problem one day, at their wits' end to know how to proceed, a stranger with an important suggestion to make was announced. He proved to be a man of harsh and rather mocking countenance, but courtly in manner. He told them that he had learned of their predicament and was ready to propose terms upon which he would supply coin sufficient to complete the church.

To the questions of the elders he replied that his name and station did not matter; he was ready to supply the cash, not as a loan but as a gift, on condition that "on the day of the dedication of the church, the first one entering the door belongs to me, skin and hair, body and soul."

There was no longer any doubt as to his identity; the terrified burghers huddled in a corner, stammering prayers and incantations. But Satan spoke soothingly to them, pointed out that there was no other way to raise the money, and the Mayor finally signed the compact with him. The Devil then vanished up the chimney, and presently bags of gold coin, enough to finish the work, came tumbling down.

SEVERAL years passed. The edifice was completed and the dedication day was set. The nature of the bargain was known throughout the town, and no one wished to be the first to enter the church.

But a priest, remembering that the pact had not stipulated whether the "first one" was to be man or beast, had a wolf trapped and its cage placed against the church door, so that when it was opened the beast would run into the building.

Terrible was Satan's rage at his defeat. Spitting fire and howling with fury, he broke the wolf's neck, slammed the church door with such force that it cracked, and flew away, leaving a smell of brimstone behind him.

The brass figure of a wolf upon the door commemorates the event, and the crack remained until modern times.

"Don't lose your nerve," he advised. "You've kept it so long."

John Smith Interferes

By MARK PLUM

John Smith, detective, hated a murder, a feeling that is shared by nearly everybody; but he had his own methods of apprehending homicidal criminals, and in this field he was unique. See if you can guess in advance of the author's explanation who killed Mrs. James E. Shedd.

TWO coal-heavers found the body. Delivering, several weeks late, the two tons ordered by Mrs. Shedd, they received no answer to their persistent bell-ringing. One-ideaed, determined creatures, they insisted on leaving behind that which they had brought. They pried open the coal-cellar window and poured in the black lumps. One crawled through the opening. "To adjust the portable chute," ran his prepared testimony at the inquest. "Looking for booze, more likely," growled the coroner, provoking an unimportant exchange of compliments.

At any rate, he crawled in over the partly filled bin and at its edge spied something that sent him back in haste to his partner. It is probable that under the grime of his profession was an unwonted pallor.

"Bill," he called hoarsely to his mate, "there's sumpin' here."

"Halves for me," promptly retorted Bill, reputed a quick thinker.

"It ain't that sort of sumpin'. It's a body."

"A body! Wha' d'ya mean—'body'?"

Bill had a fluent vocabulary. It seems advisable to omit half, the larger half, of his phrases.

"You come an' look." The voice was urgent.

Bill reluctantly hauled himself over the wagon's edge, through the window, and down the slithering coal. He saw what his mate had seen and returned, gasping, to the clean air.

"It ain't got no face!" The fact had been terribly obvious.

Bill's mate—"Chunky" was his name—nodded and spat with an air, exceedingly forced, of bravado.

"It's a woman," was his contribution. "Gawd!"

They leaned against the wagon. What they had seen tormented even their sluggish imaginations. Presently Bill roused himself from depths of unaccustomed meditation and spoke:

"We got to tell the police."

Chunky eyed him admiringly and with awe. He would never have thought of that.

"It's murder, that's what it is! We got to tell the police," Bill repeated. "They got to know about it."

TO THE police, bored after a week of home-brew raids and argumentative motorists, the news brought by Bill and Chunky was a god-send. The desk sergeant burst into surprising activity, talking, apparently simultaneously, into his phone and at Bill,

"Out at Old Man Shedd's, you say? Was it Mrs. Shedd?"

"Might 'a' bin. Yuh couldn't tell. She was pretty messy."

Into the phone: "Haydon? . . . Dead woman found in Jim Shedd's cellar. Get out there. My men will meet you."

To Bill and Chunky: "Get along with the men and show them the place. And see that you stick with them till I tell you different! You're not under arrest—yet. See?"

This brought forth some quite unprintable remarks from Bill, who had outraged the social conventions of his circle by carrying information to the police, and who now, like all nonconformists, was paying for his unconventionality.

"Gawd!" groaned Chunky, whose vocabulary lacked the wide range of Bill's.

Into the phone: "First Trust and Savings Bank? . . . Mr. Shedd there? . . . In Detroit? When'd he go? . . . When d' you expect him back? . . . No message." He put up the phone.

"Davis, Michaels, and Flannery, you get out to Jim Shedd's as quick as you can. Take Haydon's orders until I get there. Don't touch the body or track things up. Keep an eye on these 'boes." He indicated the agitated coal men, who quivered again under his glance.

But the coal-heavers were dismissed curtly after a brief inspection of the body they had found. And, oh, human nature! they resented the dismissal almost as much as they had the hint of detention. They scented social popularity, with its attendant free beer, from their close contact with the murder, and they were greedy. But they left. It was obvious that the murder had taken place at least twenty-four hours before, and the detective wanted the place clear for his speculations.

CHARLES HAYDON was Paigeville's sole detective. His ambi-

tions were boundless; his opportunities had been few. As he examined the dead woman, he became certain that Providence was watching over him. That Providence might not concur in murder to further one man's ambitions did not occur to him.

The murdered woman had been Mrs. James Shedd. Wife of Paigeville's best known banker. Mother of Paigeville's most censured flapper. Mrs. Shedd lay on her cellar floor, both legs broken and doubled under her, her face hideously crushed and mangled. There was no one else in the house. No beds had been slept in the preceding night. Mr. Haydon prowled about and made many notes in his little brown notebook.

THE doorbell rang. A policeman answered, ready to repel intruders. A very ordinary-looking man inquired for Mr. Shedd. Then for Mrs. Shedd. Then, catching a glimpse of Haydon, came joyously forward.

Haydon frowned.

"How the deuce did you get here, Smith? Where'd you hear about it?"

"Didn't. I don't even know what 'it' is. I've been in Paigeville for several days, investigating some matters for Shedd at the bank. Naturally, I made friends with the phone girl." He preened himself. Mr. Haydon did not smile. "I was there when a man phoned, inquiring anxiously for Shedd. Wondered who was so curious. Checked back and found it was the police. So I came out. Elementary, my dear Watson."

"Oh, you're very clever!" Haydon was surly.

"But not popular, eh? Now, what is 'it'?"

Haydon resented the presence of the big Chicago detective. It was rotten bad luck that he should be there at that time. His vision of himself in headline and photostat dimmed. John Smith would hog the limelight, of course. But he could, at least, make him work for it. He might even, picking his brains, secure some additional credit for himself.

"Mrs. Shedd's been murdered. Knocked down, apparently with an ax. Face crushed in, both legs broken."

"Well!" John Smith was thoughtful. "Can I see her?" He caught the expression on Haydon's face and grinned. "I won't horn in, Haydon. Honor bright. On the other hand, I might be useful."

This coincided almost too well with Haydon's thoughts. He suspected Smith's altruism, but could see no good way to avoid the proffered assistance. He led the way to the body.

John Smith's nostrils dilated, once, twice. It was an unpleasant sight.

"Poor woman!" he said, and stood staring. Finally he turned to Charles Haydon. "Found what did it?"

"Haven't had time."

They searched together. In the furnace, its handle badly charred, was an ax and some blood-stained scraps of partially burned rags. A rubber glove was found near the stairs. Haydon picked it up gingerly.

"Whoever did it isn't giving much away," remarked Smith. "Clever fellow!"

Haydon was torn between a desire to display his own cleverness and a wish to exclude Smith. The former won.

"It might not have been a man," he said.

Smith glanced at the form of Mrs. Shedd, still in the same position, but

the head at last decently covered, and raised his eyebrows.

"You have a theory?" he asked politely.

"Not complete yet, of course; but something to start with. It's notorious that Mrs. Shedd could not control her daughter, Edith. She's a wild one. Cigarettes, hip flasks, Country Club dances, and all night petting parties afterward. Poor Mrs. Shedd had strict notions, and Edith and she had some hard settos. It's been town talk for a long time."

"Oh, town talk!"

Smith shrugged.

"Yep. I know. But town talk means something just the same. You know as well as I do that plenty of real tips start that way. And lately Edith's been crazy about Old Man Shedd's nephew, Willis Shedd. He's got a soft snap at the bank. People say she was wild to marry him and her mother wouldn't have it."

"Well, that was natural enough. First cousins, aren't they?"

"No relation at all. Shedd only married about five years ago. Edith is his stepdaughter. He's fond of her, though, they say. Could do more with her than her mother ever could."

"You haven't said yet why you suspect this Edith."

"Oh, not suspect." Haydon was airy. "Not so much as that—yet. But she didn't sleep here last night."

"Might have gone to Detroit with her father."

"She might." The local detective was doubtful.

"Of course I'm not saying she did it," he went on. "Just as likely to have been done by thieves. It's just something to work on. What's your own theory?"

"Mine? Oh, I never have them."

He left the other man frowning, and went away thoughtful. He wondered if the murder fitted in with his own problem. He hoped not.

Money had been vanishing from the coffers of the First Trust and Savings Bank for some time. Expert accountants had gone over the books. Every man in the bank had been checked, his habits and expenditures investigated, but the leakage had not been found. Finally Jim Shedd had sent to Chicago for John Smith, shrewdest and least obvious of detectives.

It was the sort of job he liked, a straight, clean piece of work. Murders he considered messy, and regretted his deserved fame in solving them.

JIM SHEDD had offered the books for his inspection but he had shrugged them away.

"Out of my line," he had stated and had fixed a keen eye on the human element instead. That was his specialty. By the time of Mrs. Shedd's murder he had narrowed his hunt to two men. But there was no certainty. And the murder complicated things abominably.

He managed an interview with Edith Shedd. She was a little, slim thing, with dark eyes and a discontented mouth. He asked her many questions and when he left her, her eyes showed a hint of fear and of dawning horror. He was sorry for her. John Smith held the curious conviction that even a flapper might possess a soul.

Then she was arrested, and the headlines flared. John Smith read them and sighed. He did hate murder cases. But he arose and sought Charles Haydon. And found him smug, with a new suit and a carefully cultivated expression of

wisdom, accepting a cigar from one of the reporters who were crowding Paigeville. The murder publicity had been excellent.

The reporter left, and Haydon passed Smith the cigar. He sniffed it warily.

"Oh, it's a good one," said Haydon. "He's one of the Chicago lot."

Smith grinned and pocketed it.

"Perquisites, eh?" he asked knowingly. "I see you jailed the youthful Edith."

"You *bet!*" said Haydon with emphasis. "Say, do you know her mother had been threatening to cut her out of her will if she didn't give up young Willis Shedd? Her lawyers even had a new will drawn for her, dividing the money between charity and her husband and leaving Edith only a thousand a year. Hadn't signed it yet, and the careful Edith made sure she never would."

"Was there much involved?"

"A couple of hundred thousand, I believe. From her first husband. Old Jim Shedd's money is entirely separate."

"H'm!" said John Smith thoughtfully.

Haydon tucked his thumbs into his armholes and leaned back.

"Oh, I've more than that," he said importantly.

"Good God, I should hope so!"

"Now, don't take that line. We're sure, I tell you. I've got two people—two nice, respectable, church-going people—who heard Edith Shedd say she hated her mother, that she made her life miserable, and threaten to do something that would set her free."

"Probably meant to elope. She's eighteen, isn't she?"

"Elope! Boloney! She meant to kill her mother."

"That's your guess. It won't be the jury's if that's all you've got."

Haydon hesitated and then played his trump card.

"You won't talk, Smith? I'm keeping this from the papers." He leaned forward importantly. "Edith Shedd had a row with her mother the afternoon of the murder. Passers-by heard it—heard her storming and threatening. And no one saw Mrs. Shedd after that until the body was found on the cellar floor."

"Humph!" said John Smith again. "Looks like a nice case, doesn't it?" He bit the end off the cigar and lit it meditatively, then leaned forward and touched Haydon's knee. His voice was serious, and he held the detective's eye firmly. "And Willis Shedd, the fiancé? Where was he when Mrs. Shedd was murdered?"

Haydon flipped his ashes contemptuously. He was very assured.

"I don't know and I don't care. Edith Shedd killed her mother." His expression changed and he regarded Smith anxiously. "You promised to keep out. Don't come interfering now, messing things up. We've got a sure case."

"It does look pretty. But pretty is as pretty does. All is not gold that glitters, and things are not always what they seem. I wouldn't be too rough with young Edith, Haydon."

"What license you got in the case, anyway?"

"HEAPS, my dear man. I'm here by authority. First, Jim Shedd hired me to investigate a little difficulty at the bank. My case may tie up with your case. I don't know. I haven't solved mine yet. Then, the day after the murder he called me in again and told me to keep an eye on this affair. He was upset, Haydon. He feared for Edith. He knew she had had a row with her mother, because she wrote and told

him all about it. Over young Willis, it was."

"I want that letter."

"Ask Jim Shedd for it. Maybe you'll get it. Maybe. If he still has it and if he wants to give it to you and a few more ifs.

"He told me you were handling the case. He had perfect confidence in you and all that sort of thing. Only—he said he was afraid for Edith. Knew things looked bad for her. He spread the facts before me, Haydon, and I'll admit they do look bad. You had some excuse."

"Excuse! She killed her mother, I tell you. Even her father admits the evidence is against her."

"You're so stubborn." John Smith sighed patiently. "Not quite that, Haydon. He said it was true her mother tried to keep her on a pretty tight rein and that she resented it. But her mother loved the girl, he added, and wanted her happiness. He had thought her unwise to make her opposition to young Willis so definite. Admitted—mark this, Haydon—that he also lacked confidence in his nephew."

"That doesn't seem important to me. The fellow's just a cub, selfish and spoiled. Won't stick to business hours, but never leaves the dance hall until the last chicken's found her roost."

"But Shedd keeps him on at the bank. Well, you know best, of course, Haydon. But if it were me, I think I'd look into this selfishness. A selfish cub engaged to a rich girl who loses her money if she marries him—that is, providing the mother isn't disposed of in time. And it seems a little peculiar, to me at any rate, that an ardent fiancé should never have mentioned being with his adored one—considering her arrest and all—during that last call on her mother."

He rose. Haydon's chair came down with a crash.

"What? My God! Where'd you learn that? Are you sure?"

Smith grinned and nodded as he walked to the door.

"I hadn't a theory, you see, so I looked all around the matter. Try it next time."

"Hey, Smith! Come back here! Smith! Oh, good-night!" said Haydon as the door shut behind his visitor. He took out his little brown notebook and studied its pages. After a while he threw it on the table. He was very busy the rest of the day, but the reporters found him less communicative.

THE next morning Smith was back. "How doth the little busy bee improve each shining hour?" he asked genially. "My, but you're an active chap, Haydon! What did you want to go and arrest Willis Shedd for?"

Haydon stared.

"On your own statement."

"My statement. I didn't state that you should jail that self-sufficient pup. I'm a very careful stater."

"You said——"

"I asked—asked, mark you, sir—if you knew where Willis Shedd was when his aunty-by-marriage was being murdered, and I *stated* that he was with his fiancée when she had a row with said aunty, who was also her mother. Quite a mixed-up lot of relationships, isn't it?" He beamed on the annoyed detective. "How'd I know you were going to rush off and arrest the boy just for that? And you've still got Edith. Aren't you a bit inclusive?"

"Say, look here!" Haydon tapped his desk. "Do you or do you not believe Willis Shedd had a hand in the killing of Mrs. Shedd?"

Smith shook his head, still smiling.

"I don't believe anything. Not at this stage of the game."

"Do you or do you not suspect any one?"

"Oh, that's different! I suspect lots of people. Nothing like an open mind, you know. There's Willis and Edith and Jim Shedd himself and the last cook. Ever wonder what happened to the servant?"

"There wasn't one."

"But there had been. Mrs. Shedd always kept a hired girl—except the in-between times when she was without one. She had one a week ago, when I first got in town, because I left a note with her for Mr. Shedd that evening."

"She might have left between then and the murder."

"Sure. She might." He agreed cordially, but his agreement brought no comfort to the harassed Haydon.

JOHN SMITH lit a cigar and eyed its end thoughtfully.

"Now, look here, Haydon, I'll admit I'm not playing quite fair. But you would indulge your little theories, you know. It is possible, *possible*"—he repeated the word with emphasis—"that Edith Shedd murdered her mother. In a rage—to get her own way—to keep from losing the money. I don't know. Frankly, I don't think she did it at all. From all I've been able to learn, she's just a rather spoiled girl, too good-looking, and infatuated with a most unpleasant youth. The two might have done it together. Or the cook. Or thieves. I don't think you've looked around the thing enough. You can't get a conviction on what you've got, anyway."

"Don't I know it!" Haydon groaned. He looked up suddenly. "Are you coming clean now, Smith? Or are you just interfering and trying to upset my case because Jim Shedd's paying you to? Or have you a clue to the real murderer and not letting on? Play fair. You can have the credit."

Smith shook his head.

"I don't want it. I hate murders. All I want is to solve my own little problem, and I can't. I—can't—quite—get—it." He spoke slowly. "It's just beyond me all the time. Sometimes I think I have it, but I can't put it all together."

He rose. "Maybe the best place, temporarily, for young Willis is in jail. It won't hurt him, anyway, and it may purify his little soul. But treat the girl gently, even if you do have to hold her a few days longer. She didn't do it."

"There was a good reason to suspect her."

"Oh, yes. I don't blame you. But these modern young girls do a lot and say a lot they don't in the least mean. They're not as hard as they're painted, Haydon. She never swung that ax."

JIM SHEDD was displeased over his nephew's arrest. He summoned Haydon and talked to him hotly. Afterward he called in John Smith.

"Look here," he started. "Are you trying to get all my family jailed?"

"Oh, no, Mr. Shedd!" Smith was shocked.

"First, there was my stepdaughter."

"That wasn't my doing," interrupted the detective.

"No. You might have had some justification for that," snapped Shedd. "Haydon had his excuse. Poor girl! Her temper was always her curse. And her mother only aggravated it.

"But Willis! Why, he hasn't the spunk to swat a house-fly if it's looking straight at him. He's a shrimp, a pest, anything you like, but he could no more do murder than a four-year-old babe. But you butt in and spill a lot of irrelevant stuff to the detective in charge and get the boy jailed."

"Nuisance, ain't I?" said Smith thoughtfully. "Too bad! You told me to look into the matter, you know."

"I never meant for you to butt in and try to run it. I have every confidence in Haydon."

"And none in me. Not any more, eh?"

"What induced you to think my nephew might be involved, anyway? Of all fool ideas!"

"He might have been an accessory," murmured Smith. "There's no doubt he was with Edith that afternoon."

"I'd like to know where you learned that."

The detective shrugged.

"Not from you, sir."

Jim Shedd was thoughtful.

"Of course he might be involved. He was crazy about her."

"Funny he'd let her lie in jail, then, when his testimony might have freed her."

"I doubt if he could have done that in any case."

"Oh, do you? But he has never so much as visited the jail. Engaged to the girl, too!"

"Maybe he could not bear to see her under those conditions. I have not been able to force myself to go yet."

"But you believe her guilty." Smith slipped the statement in casually, but the banker started.

"What?" he cried. "Oh, no, I can't believe it. Little Edith! She never understood her mother, and her mother never understood her. A pitiful case! But I can't believe she did this terrible thing. I won't believe it!"

He sat stiffly, fumbling with his paper-weight. Then he spoke definitely.

"Charles Haydon seems competent," he said. "I haven't been pleased with your handling of matters, Mr. Smith. You have been here two weeks, and, as near as I can judge, have accomplished just nothing. I may tell you that it was only at the insistence of the bank's directors that you were sent for at all. I consider my judgment, that the matter would be better handled by a local man, has been vindicated. We will not need your services any longer."

"Ah! In neither case?"

"Certainly. You were never definitely retained in the case of my poor wife's murder, and your interference with Haydon has only made its solution more difficult. When I suggested — suggested only, mind you—that you look into it, I gave you no authority to upset Haydon's arrangements and go around arresting my innocent relatives."

"Ah!"

The monosyllable seemed to annoy Shedd, and he dismissed the detective curtly. John Smith left and sought Charles Haydon.

"I AM a free man," he announced. "Neither hireling nor slave, and I come to do you good."

"Lots of good you've done me so far! Just messed up a beautiful case with a lot of wild suggestions."

John Smith looked hurt.

"You pain me, Haydon. You pain me deeply. I tried to protect an innocent maid from your abuse, and you turn and rend me."

"I didn't abuse her." Haydon was sulky.

"No? Ah, well, you probably would have if I hadn't interfered. Don't destroy my illusions of myself as the champion of distressed innocence."

"Say, look here, Smith. I'm busy."

"So am I. I come with suggestions."

"Take your suggestions to—Chicago!"

"I'm not going yet. Nor the other place either. I'm too young and good. Seriously, man, I want you to do something. Tell Shedd his daughter wants to see him. Insist on his coming over. Tell him she's ill, anything. Let him know people don't understand his holding aloof from her at such a time."

"Why should I?"

"Wouldst thou keep father and child apart? Shame, Haydon!"

Haydon threw down his pen in despair.

"I'm not keeping them apart. You make me sick. It's none of my business if Jim Shedd doesn't call on his stepdaughter, who's in jail for the murder of his wife."

"Isn't it?" Smith was thoughtful. "I wonder." He hesitated. Finally he leaned forward, talking rapidly, though cautiously, into Haydon's ear. Haydon looked incredulous. Under Smith's steady flow of words, his doubts faded.

"I don't believe you in the least, you know," he said. "But it can't hurt to try it."

"That's the spirit that wins," said Smith. "Whole-hearted coöperation!"

Haydon looked the other man over carefully.

"You know, Smith," he said, "if I didn't *know* better—if I hadn't personal knowledge of dozens of difficult cases you've unraveled—I'd say you were just a plain fool. And —I'd tell you to get out of my office."

"You needn't," grinned John Smith. "I'm going." He relapsed for a moment into seriousness. "Make it two o'clock," he said. "And be sure to make the arrangements carefully."

Haydon nodded. As soon as Smith left, he phoned Mr. Shedd and requested that he visit his daughter at the time named. He did not need the excuses suggested by the flippant Smith, for the banker was willing. His willingness disturbed Haydon again, but the detective ate a hurried lunch and went over to the jail. He would play Smith's game for him once more, and, if it failed, he would stick to a lone hand in the future. He held a long conference with the scared Willis Shedd, then with Edith, along the lines suggested by the Chicago detective.

MR. JAMES SHEDD kept his appointment. Haydon led him into a bare, dismal room and asked the warden to produce Edith Shedd. She came in, accompanied by John Smith, and the banker showed annoyance.

"I thought I told you to get out," he growled.

"Tut! Tut! You said nothing about my getting out. You're so hasty, Mr. Shedd. You did take my nice new case away from me just as I was about to solve it. Curious lack of zeal for the president of a bank that has lost so much money, wasn't it? And curious, too, that such a devoted stepfather as you have convinced every one you are should now be thinking more of a humble detective's activities than of his beloved stepdaughter, so long in durance

vile. Why don't you speak to her nicely, Mr. Shedd?"

Mr. Shedd turned purple, then green. He sputtered. Smith watched him curiously.

"Don't lose your nerve," he advised. "You've kept it so long."

"I'll have you jailed, you—you—!" roared the badgered banker. "You can't get away with this sort of treatment of me. Do you know who I am!"

"Don't be flippant. Of course I know. Shall I tell you?

"You're James E. Shedd, President of the First Trust and Savings Bank. Unlucky speculator in grains. Thief of fifty thousand lovely dollars. Murderer of Mrs. James E. Shedd, after you had persuaded her to change her will in your favor and thought she had done it.

"You're the man who spent five years poisoning your wife against her daughter and poisoning the daughter against her mother; urging the one to foolish restrictions and the other to equally foolish rebellions; telling the world how you sympathized with both of them, but advertising and exaggerating the ill-feeling you worked so hard to create; getting that rotten young cub of a nephew of yours to work on a young girl's affections, so that you could persuade your wife to use her money as a weapon to break off the undesirable match. I don't know whether he was in on your thefts, too, or whether you only bribed him to do what you wanted in regard to your stepdaughter. He didn't know—definitely—that you had done the murder. I'm sure of that. You said rightly that he lacked the spunk. But he guessed it. Oh, yes, Mr. Shedd, I know who you are!"

The banker sprang suddenly, catlike, at John Smith, but the detective held him easily.

"Oh, you can't kill *me!* I'm no weak, trusting woman. And you haven't an ax handy. There are men outside the door waiting for you, Jim Shedd. Remember, this is a jail. You're due to learn more about jails soon."

He held him easily by the arms and continued:

"You had a letter that told of Edith's quarrel with her mother. Who made that quarrel? Who sent her to that house with the boy your wife loathed? Who talked to a silly, spoiled child about her mother's prejudice, and reminded her that she was of age and urged her to assert herself? Who, Jim Shedd?"

Edith Shedd had sat white-faced and horror-stricken. Now she stirred and whispered, unable to raise her voice:

"Oh, he did! He did! I see now. Always he pretended to pet and indulge me and talked of my making 'allowances' for mother's 'cruelty.' She wasn't cruel! She only loved me!" She broke into wild weeping.

John Smith shook the dazed man he was holding.

"Registered in Detroit, didn't you? Came back to Paigeville and hid in the house. As soon as Edith and Willis had left, after the noisy quarrel you had been so sure would take place, you sneaked out and threw your wife down the cellar stairs. It didn't kill her, only broke her legs, so you smashed her face in while she watched you. Didn't you, you devil? And you thought you'd fool me—me, John Smith—by pretending you were anxious to solve the mystery. Asked me to look into it and then called me off when you were afraid I might frighten Willis into letting something slip of your dirty scheming! Bah, you fool!"

He dropped him and turned abruptly.

"Call your men, Haydon. He's yours now. I'm through."

Haydon stepped to the door, but Jim Shedd was quicker than he. He had come prepared. There was a shot, and he crumpled sidewise. Haydon sprang toward him and the guards rushed in. They busied themselves about the recumbent figure, but Smith held aloof.

"Not worth working over," he said. "He wouldn't bungle that."

He took Edith away.

LATER Haydon joined him, looking despondent.

"It was through the heart. I blame myself. If I had believed your story, I would have guarded against this."

"It's better this way. Saves a lot of unpleasantness for a lot of important people. My employers, the bankers, for instance. They really hired me, of course. Put Shedd in a position where he dared not refuse. You might keep that part about Shedd's stealing from them dark if you can. They'd appreciate it. Very bad publicity. Their President, you know." He stretched himself.

"You're a law-abiding lot in Paigeville," he said thirstily. "Very inhospitable!"

Haydon went out and returned with a flask and a couple of glasses.

"Say when." There was an interval. Smith drew a long breath.

"I needed that," he said. "I must be getting back to Chicago," he added. "I'm wanted to look into the sudden disappearance of a well-known florist."

"You'll see the reporters first? They'll be looking for you."

"Oh, Lord, no! Not me. I'm only an interfering busybody. This is your job."

"The deuce it is! I was miles off the scent. Why'd you help me out if you won't take the credit for it? I didn't encourage you any."

"Not exactly." John Smith grinned. "It wasn't for your sake, my dear Charles. It just fitted in with my bank investigations. And I was glad to help Edith out. Poor kid!

"I've a weakness for the modern young girl. She's so puzzled. She's ditched the gods of her fathers and hasn't found any new ones to take their places." He filled his glass again. "To the famous American flapper," he said, smiling. "Long may she rave!"

He emptied the glass, and, rising, extended his hand to Haydon.

"I need a night's sleep before I start thinking about that florist," he finished. "I believe they get murdered to spite me."

He sighed.

"I do hate murder," said Plain John Smith.

The prisoner found amusement playing the guitar.

Famous Unsolved Mysteries

A SERIES

By ALVIN F. HARLOW

4. The Man In the Iron Mask

Was he a foreign emissary who knew too much—this man doomed to live his life with a velvet-covered iron mask concealing his features? Or was he the illegitimate son of a royal house—perchance even the elder brother of the king? He was undoubtedly some person of high rank—and yet the secret of his pitiful life will, undoubtedly, never be discovered.

ON THE afternoon of September 16, 1698, a little while before sunset, a party of armed horsemen rode up to the gate of the Bastille, the gloomy fortress-prison of Paris. They were in attendance upon M. de Saint-Mars, the newly-appointed governor of the prison, who was coming from his recent post at the *Iles Ste. Marguerite*, off the Mediterranean coast, to assume his new position. In the midst of the group, carried in a sort of litter or palanquin, closely guarded by men on all sides, was a man whose features were concealed by a black velvet mask. This man was a state prisoner—one who had been under the charge of Saint-Mars for many long

years. What his name was and what his offense had been, no one knew. Some whispered that though Saint-Mars had been his jailer—for how long? Some say nineteen years, others, with apparently better evidence, twenty-nine years—that even Saint-Mars did not know his name!

In 1698 Louis XIV—*Le Grand Monarque*—was sixty years old and had sat upon the throne of France for fifty-five years. During the early part of his reign he had pushed his dominion into the northwestern part of Italy—that portion known as Piedmont—and had held the fortress of Pignerol. In 1669 Saint-Mars was governor of this fortress, which, like all other strongholds of that day, was also used as a prison for political offenders or unfortunates accused of such offenses. To this fortress in 1669 a man was hurried, all the way across France, with the greatest precautions for secrecy and with strict orders that his name be not known. There is nothing to show that he was masked when taken on this journey to the most distant fortress held by France; but some interesting evidence has been produced which indicates that he was probably the one who later became "The Man in the Iron Mask."

Twelve years later Saint-Mars was transferred to the *Château des Exiles;* and letters and papers still in existence show that when he made the change he took one prisoner with him. Who that prisoner was is not revealed. The secrecy of some of the transactions of those days is impenetrable. Even after we have become certain a few years later that the masked man is in Saint-Mars' charge, there is nothing in his official correspondence with the governmental ministers to give a hint of the man's identity. He is always referred to merely as "the prisoner" or "the prisoner in the mask."

In 1687 Saint-Mars was transferred to the command of the *Iles Ste. Marguerite,* a little group of fortified islets just off the Mediterranean coast of France, near Cannes. With him to the fortress on the largest island—a prison within a prison—went the man whom we can now definitely identify as the prisoner in the mask. From there, eleven years later, he accompanied Saint-Mars to the Bastille.

WHAT was the reason for this unfortunate man's terrible punishment? Perhaps never elsewhere in history has there been so romantic, so mysterious, an episode. For two hundred years historians have vainly sought for the true key to the secret. Among dozens of theories, only three or four seem to have any plausibility. Either the man had committed some great crime against the State, or he was imprisoned because of the accident of his birth. The latter idea seems most satisfactory to the present writer, one reason being the extraordinary deference shown to the prisoner. The reports of this attitude are so numerous and so persistent that there must be some truth in them. It is said that King Louis's great minister, Louvois, once visited the prisoner at Pignerol and remained standing while in his presence. It is also told that he addressed the prisoner as *"Monseigneur"*—a form of salutation used only in speaking to the higher nobility, to princes of the Church, or to royalty. Saint-Mars always carried the prisoner's food to him and stood bareheaded in his presence, as did any others of the few who saw him. Gossip has it that Saint-Mars addressed him as *Mon*

Prince or *Monseigneur*, though this cannot be confirmed.

Upon reaching the Bastille, the prisoner was committed to a room in the tower which had already been handsomely fitted up for his use. De Rosarges, the new "major" of the Bastille, who had come with Saint-Mars from *Ste. Marguerite*, was put in personal charge of the man, and he alone (aside from Saint-Mars) was permitted to hold any communication with the masked unfortunate. The prisoner was given almost any comfort that he asked for—fine clothing, books, and good food. His greatest liking was for extremely fine linen and lace; but his movements were closely watched, and when, after two or three years in the Bastille, he was found writing messages upon his white linen, it was taken away from him and black was substituted in its stead. He was served from silver dishes. He found amusement in playing the guitar.

The legend that the mask was of iron is disproved from dozens of sources, including his jailers and persons who saw him when he was moved from one prison to another. The mask was really of black velvet, though it is said to have been made upon a light iron frame which held it closely over the man's face. Louis XIV is known to have exclaimed: "No one must know the identity of this man!"—and evidently it was feared that the prisoner's face alone would be sufficient to tell his secret—which seems to hint that he may have borne a striking resemblance to some royal personage. Voltaire asserts that the lower part of the mask was arranged with springs and hinges so that its wearer could eat without removing it. It is even claimed that he was compelled to sleep with it on. A confessor who visited the prison once a year never saw his face. An old doctor of the Bastille who attended him in his illness saw his tongue and portions of his body, but not his countenance. He declared that the man was finely formed, and it was whispered in later years that he said the prisoner spoke with an English accent.

THE MAN was always lodged in a room where no one could see him from outside the prison. It is related that once, while he was at Ste. Marguerite, he scratched an appeal for help on one of his silver dishes, adding his name, and threw it out of his window. It was found on the beach by a fisherman, who was presently brought before the governor.

"Have you read what is on this dish?" demanded Saint-Mars.

"I cannot read, your worship," replied the fisherman.

His mere word could not be accepted, and he was detained and given severe tests to make sure that he was illiterate. When he was finally released, Saint-Mars said to him ominously as he went out: "It is fortunate for you that you cannot read." The penalty for any one who attempted to discover or disclose the prisoner's identity was death.

Whether all these incidents and details are strictly correct or not, the major facts which we have related concerning the man are proven by numerous documents still in existence. The letters between the minister Louvois and Saint-Mars allude to him again and again, but never mention his name, his crime, nor even whether he had committed any crime.

For five years the masked man remained a prisoner at the Bas-

tille; then the long agony of expiation came suddenly to an end. On the gloomy, lowering afternoon of Tuesday, November 20, 1703, just at dusk, the great drawbridge of the château was lowered, and a huddled, melancholy little procession came forth—a few men carelessly bearing a coffin and two minor officials of the prison as masters of ceremonies. There were no mourners, no music. In the fast-gathering darkness the body was conveyed to the cemetery of the church of St. Paul, where it was silently and hastily buried, with destructive chemicals in the shroud, in order that the flesh might quickly disintegrate. In the burial register the deceased was entered as "Marchioly"—a false name—and his age was given as forty-five, though he was obviously older.

The precautions for secrecy did not end even then. The walls, ceiling, and floor of the room he had occupied were all carefully painted, so that any message he might have left would be covered up; and every article he had used was destroyed. Thus vanished a man whose name, some claim, was unknown not only to his jailer but even to the prisoner himself.

SPECULATION as to his identity began during his life and became much excited after his death. The Princess Palatine, sister-in-law of Louis XIV and a great gossip, wrote to a friend: "I have just learned who was the masked man who died in the Bastille. He was an English lord who had been mixed up in the affair of the Duke of Berwick"—natural son of the English king James II—"against King William."

But the old lady's guess was ridiculously wide of the mark. Equally erroneous was the suggestion that the masked man was Fouquet, former powerful minister of finance, who had been disgraced by the king and sent to Pignerol in 1664. There is indisputable evidence that Fouquet died in Pignerol in 1680.

Another wild theory was that the prisoner was the Armenian church patriarch Avedick, who was kidnaped in Constantinople in the course of an intrigue too complicated to relate here. But the fault with this story is that Avedick was alive and at liberty after the Bastille prisoner died in 1703.

Some would have it that the unknown was the Duc de Beaufort, who disappeared in 1669, after being defeated in a sea battle, and whose body was never found. But in 1698 Beaufort would have been eighty-three years old, whereas the masked prisoner was then fully twenty-five or thirty years younger, still tall and erect, though his hair was white. For the same reason the rumor that it was he and not Louis XIII, who was the real father of Louis XIV, was equally impossible. Such a man would necessarily have been eighty years old or more at the time of the journey to the Bastille.

An explanation long seriously considered was that the prisoner was a soldier of fortune named Marechal, who had headed a conspiracy to assassinate the king and his ministers. Some cipher dispatches passing between the king and Louvois induced others to believe that the man was General Bulonde, who gave up the siege of a city prematurely and so lost an important campaign for the king. One weakness of such surmises as this is that kings in those days were not in the habit of devising so elaborate, so expensive, and withal so gentle a punishment for such offenders. The usual practice was to cut off their heads. Furthermore, even if such a man had been kept a prisoner, he would not have received such deference and

care, and no such strenuous measures would have been taken to prevent his identity from becoming known.

The rumor current at the time that the prisoner was a second son of Oliver Cromwell, the English Lord Protector, is likewise easily discredited. Cromwell's family history is pretty well known, and even if he had a second son, nobody has ever produced any good reason why he should have been kept a prisoner in France.

A THEORY which has many circumstances to recommend it and which has been accepted by some careful investigators is that the prisoner was one Ercole Matthioly, secretary of state to the Duke of Mantua, in Italy, who secretly agreed in 1678 to sell to France the fortified city of Casale. Matthioly went to Paris to conclude the treaty, and while there was royally treated by King Louis and loaded with diamonds and other gifts. Naturally, Mantua's allies and the other Italian States would be bitterly opposed to France's gaining possession of so important an outpost in Italian territory; and no sooner had Matthioly left France with King Louis' gifts in his coffers than the whole story of the deal became known in the courts of Turin, Madrid, and Vienna, and to the Venetian government, the very ones most likely to object strenuously to it. The result was that Louis' little scheme was wrecked before he had opportunity to throw troops into his new fortress. His rage at Matthioly, who, he found, had "double-crossed" him by secretly warning these governments, was terrific. He gave orders that the sly diplomat, even though he was in foreign territory, must be captured and punished. And so it happened that several weeks later a band of armed men—who were, of course, French secret agents—seized Matthioly one night as he was returning homeward in his carriage, threw him into another carriage, and drove madly away. From that moment Matthioly vanished forever.

That was in 1679. It is believed by some—though there is no definite information to that effect—that Matthioly was taken directly to Pignerol, the nearest French fortress, and there began his career as the Man of the Mask. The fact that the prisoner of the Bastille was buried under a somewhat similar name. Marchioly, adds color to the story; and a further bit of evidence is claimed in the fact that Louis XV, great-grandson and successor of Louis XIV, when teased by Madame de Pompadour to reveal to her who the masked man was, finally told her that he was a minister of an Italian prince.

But on another occasion this same king made a much more serious and significant statement to his daughter (we shall quote it later), which contradicted this theory, and which leads us to believe that the burial under the name of Marchioly was merely a ruse, intended to be a hint that it was the Italian trickster Matthioly who had been the masked man, and thus to divert attention from his real identity. Again we are confronted by the logical argument that instead of boarding and lodging for nineteen years a man who had so played the traitor to him, Louis would have been far more apt to direct his agents to shoot Matthioly as soon as they got outside of Mantua and bury him by the roadside, or else take him to Pignerol and torture him to death.

And now we approach the more interesting theories—namely, that the prisoner was of royal blood.

One of the most easily disposed of is the rumor that he was Louis, Count de Vermandois, son of Louis XIV and Louise de la Vallière. When a mere boy in his 'teens Vermandois went to serve with the army in Flanders, and there was taken ill and died in 1683. But a romantic yarn was told a hundred years or so later to the effect that before he went to the army he committed some great crime—the belief was that while in play he had struck the Dauphin, the legitimate son of the king; and for this his death was announced as having occurred in Flanders, while in reality he was committed to prison. But this is disproven by much documentary evidence concerning his illness and death, and by proof of the king's sincere grief thereat. Finally, the Count of Vermandois would still have been in his thirties in 1703, which makes him too young for the prisoner of the Bastille.

SOME of the most persistent rumors, believed in by many eminent Frenchmen, had it that the Mask was a brother or illegitimate half-brother to King Louis XIV. Here at last we begin to see the possibility of a real reason for keeping the prisoner's identity secret, and yet a reluctance to take his life. Louis XIV, though utterly selfish and often harsh, was not a bloodthirsty man; and, furthermore, he was a strong believer in the sanctity of royal blood. Had he known that he had a brother who might dispute his claim to the throne, or whose very existence was a disgrace, it seems probable that he would have behaved just as he actually did toward the prisoner of the mask.

For two centuries after her death, gossip assailed the reputation of Anne of Austria, Queen of Louis XIII. For years Anne and her husband were not on the best of terms, and the birth of Louis XIV, after they had been married twenty-three years, came as a surprise to the country. The Duc d'Orleans, Regent during the minority of Louis XV, is said to have admitted, while drunk, that the Mask was the son of Queen Anne and the great prime minister, Mazarin. Another story is that he was the son of Anne and the English Duke of Buckingham, who visited France in 1625 and became much infatuated with the queen. But to begin with, this would have made the masked prisoner about seventy-eight when he died, which does not accord with testimony as to his appearance; and, furthermore, there is good evidence to show that Anne curtly repelled Buckingham's arduous love-making. Voltaire does not say who the father was, but he is convinced that the prisoner was a son of Anne of Austria, born several years before Louis XIV and by some other father than the king. He says that Anne confided her secret to Cardinal Richelieu, and that the boy was brought up in secrecy, even his half-brother, Louis XIV, being ignorant of his existence until after the death of Mazarin in 1661, when the king was twenty-three years of age.

NEXT we come to the theory accepted by Dumas, the novelist, and other prominent Frenchmen: namely, that the prisoner was a twin brother of Louis XIV. The story, as it was usually told, is that the infant who became Louis XIV was born about noon, and that his twin brother was born several hours later, while the king was at dinner, celebrating the first event; that the queen, fearing trouble might result from twin heirs to the throne, decided to suppress all knowledge of the second child's birth, and swore

the physician and attendants to secrecy. Never in history had twin heirs to a throne been born, and there might have ensued the gravest complications, inasmuch as some eminent scientists of that day held that the second child born was in reality the elder.

As the narrative goes on, Dame Perronnette, a nurse, was at first given charge of the boy and reared him in her own family, the supposition being that he was the unwanted child of some great noble. But a little later Richelieu handed him over to the Governor of Burgundy to be brought up, though secretly, yet in a maner befitting a king's son. Here, at the age of nineteen, the prince, while rummaging in a casket of letters belonging to the governor, discovered the secret of his birth through letters from the queen mother, from Richelieu and Mazarin. As he threatened to cause trouble, it was necessary to inform the king (who had already been fourteen years on the throne) of his existence; and Louis, to make his throne safe, placed his brother in prison, and, because of the amazing resemblance between them, caused the unlucky twin's face to be covered forever after with a mask.

As Dumas tells the story in his novel, "The Man in the Iron Mask," it was Anne of Austria herself who caused the younger prince to be imprisoned, and King Louis did not learn of his existence until an audacious attempt was made by conspirators to exchange the two—to throw Louis into the Bastille and set his brother on the throne—in the belief that no one would ever be able to discover that a change had been made. This plot, as Dumas tells it, was foiled by one honest man who discovered it, and Louis, frightened by his narrow escape, yet unwilling to put his own brother to death, sent him to a distant prison and condemned him to hide his face under a mask through the rest of his life.

AGAIN and again rumors bob up that the prisoner "spoke with an English accent." One of these reports comes from a physician named Nelaton, who practised near the *Porte St. Antoine* in Paris. He declared that he was called into the Bastille to bleed a prisoner who was slightly ill. The governor took him into a chamber where the man lay in an easy chair, swathed in a yellow and black dressing gown with large gold flowers on it, and with his head and face completely covered by a large napkin, which was tied behind his neck. He said the man's accent sounded English. Other things in connection with this man's story gave rise to the belief that the prisoner was the Duke of Monmouth, a presumably illegitimate son of King Charles II of England. Monmouth's mother was Lucy Walters, a girl whom Charles met while he was in exile and Cromwell was ruling England; and though it was rumored that Charles married her, this cannot be proved, and it would certainly have been contrary to his practice in such cases. Anyhow, Monmouth was a popular figure in England while his father lived. When Charles died and his brother, James II, came to the throne in 1685, Monmouth headed an insurrection against him, but was defeated in battle, captured, and supposedly executed on Tower Hill in London.

But though he was beheaded in the immediate presence of bishops and other witnesses, and though a large crowd looked on from more distant points of view in the streets and from windows and housetops, the rumor persisted for years that

it was not Monmouth who was put to death. There were thrilling stories of a closed carriage which was driven up to a gate of the Tower at dead of night, and into which Monmouth was hustled and borne away toward France. It was claimed that when the plot to free the duke was being formed, an officer of Monmouth's army, also imprisoned in the Tower, was asked if he would be willing to go to the scaffold in his lord's place, and that he accepted the sacrifice joyfully; that he was "made up" to look as much like Monmouth as possible, and that, though some of the bishops at the scaffold knew of the substitution, they held their tongues. It was told also that a lady of title who knew the duke compelled the Tower officials to show her the corpse afterward, and that she exclaimed: "This is not Monmouth!"

There are several objections to this theory, one being that it is difficult to see why Louis XIV should have so carefully and expensively concealed for eighteen years a foreign prince who was strongly opposed to him in religion as well as in politics.

AND now for one more theory, in support of which Monsignor Arthur S. Barnes, an eminent Catholic prelate of England, has recently published an interesting and carefully written book. His argument is one of the most plausible of all, though it, too, as he admits, cannot be backed up all the way through by proofs. He believes that the prisoner was the eldest of King Charles' illegitimate sons, the one generally known as James Stuart. Returning from a trip to Holland in 1646 when he was only sixteen years old, Charles, then the Prince of Wales, met a young lady of distinguished family on the island of Jersey, who some time later became the mother of a boy. The child was sent abroad at an early age and educated in Holland and France under an assumed name.

In 1665 he came to London and was with his father for a time. The king probably intended keeping him and ennobling him, but the youth was studious and pious, and shrank from the thought of court life, so Charles consented that he go abroad again to study, assigning to him a comfortable income. In 1667 the young man was received into the Catholic Church in Germany, and in 1668 he went to Rome and joined the Jesuits. While he was there, King Charles wrote letters to him and to the General of the Jesuits, which letters are still in existence. That year the young man visited his father again, then returned to Rome and—here his name mysteriously vanishes from history. It is not found among the Jesuit Fathers nor anywhere else, as far as investigators can determine. A curious circumstance is that a young man died in Naples that year, who claimed to be James, a son of King Charles, though the indications are that he was an impostor.

But in the following year, 1669, a supposed astrologer, "the Abbé Pregnani," spent much time with King Charles in England, supposedly casting his horoscope and instructing him in the cult. Recent research shows that Pregnani was in reality a negotiator between Louis XIV and Charles. There is no information whatsoever on Pregnani's past, but Mr. Barnes is satisfied that he was James Stuart, the king's son, then about twenty-three years of age. His mission was to induce Charles to throw over his allies, Holland and Sweden, and to make a new and offensive alliance with France. But though it appears

that the jovial king enjoyed the masquerade and the mock astrology hugely, he evidently feared that Parliament would not back him if he took the action desired, and so the Abbé Pregnani was compelled to return to France in July, defeated.

His mission having been a failure, Pregnani might now be regarded with fear by King Louis because he possessed valuable political secrets dangerous to France. There is no direct evidence that he was imprisoned upon his return; he simply vanishes from sight as completely as James Stuart had done the year before. On July 17 Lionne, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, wrote to another minister that the Abbé Pregnani was expected from England at any minute. That is the last written word we have concerning him. But two days later, July 19, the prime minister, Louvois, wrote to Saint-Mars at Pignerol, far away on the slopes of the Alps, bidding him prepare to receive a prisoner of state who was starting from Dunkirk, on the English Channel. It was necessary, said the letter, to guard him with all precautions that could possibly be devised. His name was not given and no crime was alleged, nor was it said of him—as it often was in similar cases—that he was a rascal whom the king desired to punish. The principal thing impressed upon Saint-Mars was that the man must on no account be given an opportunity to tell anything he knew, to any living soul, even to Saint-Mars himself. No one must see him but Saint-Mars, who must carry his food to him daily with his own hands. Even with Saint-Mars, his intercourse must be strictly limited. He might talk, but only about his own needs. If he should attempt to tell Saint-Mars or any one else "that on which he was employed before he came to Pignerol," he was to be warned that it would cost him his life.

These instructions remind one so strongly of the treatment of the masked man in later years that one is inclined to lean toward this theory as a possible solution. King Louis' high reverence for royal blood would explain the deferential treatment of the prisoner. And yet some disturbing questions arise. King Charles lived for sixteen years longer. Supposing the prisoner to have been his son, did Charles know what had become of him? And if so, why did he quietly acquiesce in the life imprisonment of a son whom he loved so well? These things are hard to explain away.

NOT all of the theories recited here had been propounded when Louis XV, fully forty years after the prisoner's death, made this mysterious comment upon the case to his daughter: "Let them talk as they will, no one has ever yet spoken the truth about the Iron Mask. What you should know that others don't know is this—that, at least, his imprisonment did no harm to any one save himself."

That final strange and cryptic remark was the last word known to have been spoken on the subject by possibly the last man who knew the truth. Chamillart, the last of the ministers of Louis XIV, who had died several years before, knew the secret, but refused to reveal it even on his deathbed. Louis XVI is said to have been ignorant of it. Napoleon longed to penetrate the mystery, but could not. With this, we leave the reader to ponder a mystery which has intrigued the minds of men and women for two hundred years, and which will probably never be solved

Red swept the covering from his "camera."

Movie Stuff

By H. M. SUTHERLAND

Red Higgins, camera man, wanted some colorful motion pictures, so his cowboy friend, Bellicose Bill, obligingly tinted things up for him. And then, not finding the Mexican bandit general's scenario quite to their liking, they twisted the story to suit themselves.

"FROM all appearances, Angelina Celestine," observed "Bellicose Bill" Haslip to the slim, restive mule he bestrode, "the town of Quarteros is havin' itself a celebration of some sort. Suppose we kinda amble down and join in them festivities?"

Accordingly Bellicose Bill turned off at right angles and headed for the gaily festooned cluster of adobe houses nestling with a deceptive air of serenity among the hills a few miles south of the Arizona border. Flags drooped at dejected angles from the balconies, and much and varicolored bunting was in evidence along the principal street, particu-

larly in the vicinity of the plaza, where scores of nondescripts were milling with unaccustomed energy.

Possessing not the slightest idea of the nature of the celebration, and impelled only by a desire to see and talk with human beings, Bill's intentions were absolutely peaceful; and yet, with the realization that his good intentions were often lost in similar joyous gatherings, Bill twirled the cylinder of one of his guns to assure himself that it was in shape for immediate action. But in spite of Bill's name, reputation, and artillery, his mission across the border was far from warlike. The faint trail of a dozen head of cattle, strayed from the Bar-Dollar range, had led him in the direction of the Sierra Vegas mountains and the haunts of General Francisco Rojas, but he had anticipated no trouble in recovering the strays. There was no evidence of rustling, yet nevertheless he was watchful and wary, for he had been in the Sierra Vegas hills previously and had learned to expect the unexpected.

The lure of the excitement, the sound of the music, and other visible and audible evidences of a holiday in Quarteros, sent the rowels of Bill's spurs between Angelina Celestine's ribs, and that sleek little mule stretched out like a tan shoestring at a speed that would have put the average cow-pony to shame. In fact, Angelina Celestine's ability to run had been the source of much comment and innumerable bets throughout the border country. It was one of the chief contributing factors to Bellicose Bill's international fame.

ON REACHING the outskirts of the town, Bill slowed his mule to a trot and pushed his way through the crowd of heterogeneous humanity toward the plaza, where several hundred citizens in holiday attire were grouped about an open space which was roped off, and in the center of which had been constructed a large, well-decorated platform. Bill rode in closer, determined to make a few inquiries, and on glancing over the crowd he located a lone American, evidently the representative of some moving picture concern, standing by his camera, apparently ready to take a few shots when the celebration started.

There was something familiar about the easy carriage and the red hair to the camera man, and Bill scratched his head thoughtfully, trying to remember where he had seen the fellow previously. Then the photographer happened to glance in Bill's direction, and simultaneously Bill startled the crowd about him with a whoop of joy. In another instant he was urging his mule forward, scattering men, women, and children before him in utter confusion.

"Red Higgins, y'u pie-eyed son of a gun!" he greeted, swinging from his mule and grabbing the other's hand in the grip of a vise.

"Bellicose Bill!" gasped Red. "Where the devil did you drop from?" The grin on Red's face was as wide as that on Bill's.

"Just happened by while lookin' for some stray cattle. I'm ridin' for the Bar-Dollar acrost the border. Y'u gone into the movies?"

"We're shootin' a job back in the hills," admitted Red, "but I'm here to-day to pick up a little local color which the boss thought we might use. Think of runnin' into you here, Bill! Come on—let's get a drink for the sake of old times."

"Not aguardiente," protested Bill mildly. "The last time I tried that stuff—'twas in Juarez—they called out the fire department. Now, if we just had some of that cognac we

used to get at Madame Voisin's place in Bar le Duc! I've been figgerin' some on goin' back across to France and see if Madame is still doin' business at the old stand." Bill tossed the reins of his bridle to a boy and flipped a *peso* in payment.

"I've been tryin' to locate y'u, Red, ever since the armistice, and I had just about come to the conclusion that y'u'd pegged out in the hospital."

"Same here, Bill," replied Red, leading the way into the nearest *pulperia*. "What happened to you after you got your discharge? Nobody seemed to know what had become of you. I never found out until almost a year after I saw you last that it was you who cleaned up that machine-gun nest and brought me back into the lines the day I got drilled through. One of the boys in the hospital at Washington told me about that. I'm not forgettin' that, Bill."

"'Twasn't nothin', Red," deprecated Bill with a shrug. "Y'u'd 'a' done the same for me . . . *Muchacho!*"

The boy came to their table and stood grinning.

"Boy," said Bill in Spanish, "I hear that your cognac is of the best and that it is buried deep in the cellar where it has never seen the light of day. I also hear that your cognac will soon be sent across the border for an excellent price, but I think that you could bring to us a bottle. If you will do for us this honor, it may bring good fortune to your master. If not, then *quien sabe?*"

With a shrug that might have expressed almost anything, the boy departed, and a few seconds later was in earnest conversation with Pedro, the owner of the *pulperia*.

"How did you know of this cognac?" demanded Red softly.

"I didn't. 'Twas a long shot, but I think it's workin'. Pedro will trust me to keep my mouth shut."

Just then the boy appeared with a well-wrapped bottle which both Bill and Red recognized as the brandy they wanted, and gravely they shook hands across the table. A quarter of an hour later, by dint of much persuasion, they succeeded in separating another bottle from Pedro, and, having finished it, they adjourned to the plaza, happily singing an uncensored verse of "Hinkey Dinkey Parley Vous."

"What's the idea of this celebration, anyhow?" inquired Bill, halting and surveying the crowd speculatively.

"General Francisco Rojas," explained Red, with a crooked grin, "is runnin' for governor. He's stagin' a parade, free music, a barbecue, and a grand fandango to top it off tonight."

"General Rojas!" ejaculated Bill softly. "Why, the chink-smugglin', cattle-rustlin', woman-stealin' polecat! Won't the *rurales* grab him off if he shows up in town?"

"Looks like he's bought 'em off. Anyway, he's runnin' strong, and these locoed bozos around here are hot for him. He's lousy with *pesos*, and he's scatterin' 'em with a free hand. He held my company off for a sizable amount before he'd let us shoot the job we're down here workin' on now. He's a past master at the gentle art of graftin'."

"The rangers across the line would shore like to get in range of that buzzard," observed Bill thoughtfully. "They've got the goods on him for smugglin' coolies over."

RED nodded and busied himself with his camera, for the vanguard of the parade had already appeared, consisting largely of small boys and mongrel dogs. After them

came General Rojas' army, a nondescript gathering of professional bandits who, according to Higgins, had been encamped on the outskirts of town while their leader and his staff had been billeted in the mansion of the *Alcalde*. With band playing and flags flying, and surrounded by a squad of trim *vaqueros*, appeared General Rojas, a pompous, fat, bewhiskered man of indeterminate age and lineage.

Over Rojas' head streamed a large national flag, and fastened to it was a square of canvas bearing a fair likeness of the general in glittering uniform. Beneath it the bowing, smiling candidate rode astride a night-black horse, and bedight in his velvet uniform and crimson silk sash he was, to say the least, conspicuous, basking delightedly in the plaudits of the populace, his heavy jowled, sensuous face plainly mirroring his gratified vanity.

"Behold the conquerin' hero!" drawled Bellicose Bill. "Think of that fat lizard for governor!"

Red grunted his disgust, but offered no comment.

THE parade came to a halt in the plaza, and the soldiers spread in a complete circle about their commander. Rojas was taking no chances. The band blared the Mexican national anthem, and Rojas stood at rigid attention, his short, squat figure ridiculous in the pose. When the music ceased he advanced to the edge of the platform and raised his hand for silence.

Red, who had been steadily grinding out film, at last straightened and prepared to take his departure, but Bill halted him with a gesture.

"Thinkin' of stayin' for the general's speech, Bill?" demanded Red, raising his eyebrows questioningly.

"No," returned Bill with a chuckle, "but I've got an idea. Didn't I hear y'u remark that y'u wanted some local color a little while ago?"

"Yeah."

"Then stick aroun' for a few minutes and I'll proceed to color her up some for y'u. Get yoreself set for some fast duckin' when the jamboree opens up—be ready to grab yore camera if the stampede heads this way."

With two quick strides Bill reached Angelina Celestine's side, and in another second he was mounted and spurring straight for General Rojas. Leaning far out of the saddle, he snatched the banner and Rojas' picture and with a quick jerk ripped them from the staff to which a frightened soldier still clung. It was the work of an instant to knot flag and canvas to his mule's tail, and then straighten up with a gun in each hand.

A single wild yell, followed by two shots, scattered the soldiery before him and gave him a clear path through to the platform, toward which he dashed, yelling and shooting, the flag flapping wildly in the breeze behind him. For a couple of seconds the crowd was stunned to inaction, and then came a sudden panic. General Rojas dived from the platform and sought the cover of a statue near the fountain, and his army melted from sight, for they were adept at finding cover even where none was afforded.

Left in complete possession of the field, Bill circled the plaza twice, and by that time the soldiery were beginning to recover from their fright. From five or six windows beyond the plaza came as many shots at Bill, but without result, and once more that little mule darted like a streak around the square. Then, with a yell of defiance mixed with laughter, Bill headed down the street in the direction of the open range to the south. Through it all Red Higgins,

a joyous smile playing about the corners of his mouth, steadily turned his crank. When Bill had vanished, he picked up his camera and quietly melted into the excited crowd.

At that moment General Rojas appeared, storming and fuming. From his words, it seemed that not only he but the Republic of Mexico as well had been grossly insulted, and that nothing less than the blood of the American *diablo* would atone for the outrage. He swore luridly at his followers for their cowardice, entirely forgetting his own, and threatened them with dire punishment. In the end he offered a reward of one thousand *pesos* to the man who would bring in the *gringo*, dead or alive, preferably the former, and a score of *vaqueros* swung immediately on the trail of the fugitive.

THREE hours later Bellicose Bill was threading the wild pear thickets which skirted the foothills of the Sierra Vegas. With the realization that pursuit was following close on his heels, he lost no time in seeking out the deeper and more impenetrable fastnesses of the dividing range, knowing that once within its coverts he was safe for the time being.

Twice during the afternoon he had seen the dust cloud thrown up by the *vaqueros* who were on his trail, but they were at least a mile in the rear, and they gave him no real concern. But the persistence with which they clung to his trail told him that they meant business, and that he might as well relinquish his idea of making further search for the strayed cattle. Also, it seemed now to be expedient to slip back across the border at the earliest opportunity.

Far back in the hills, in a deep, hidden canyon, he made camp, boiling a cup of coffee and broiling a couple of slices of bacon on a stick over a guarded blaze. Then he rolled himself in his blanket and, crawling into a clump of bushes at least fifty yards distant from his fire and his picketed mule, he fell asleep.

At daybreak the next morning he was in the saddle, swinging back in a northwesterly direction, intending to strike back through the Black Mesa country, where his presence was less likely to be noted by outriders from the scattering ranches. By noon he was in the high country a dozen miles west of Quarteros and approximately the same distance from the border, riding with caution and taking advantage of every depression and possible cover the trail afforded.

Topping out on the rim of one of the highest ranges on the Black Mesa, he pulled his mule to a halt under the shadows of an overhanging rock and sent a searching glance down across the valley beneath him. With narrowed eyes he watched a scene of activity going on along the floor of the depression, and for an instant he debated slipping back behind the rim and skirting further west.

Three horsemen were riding down the valley, and close behind them followed a group of at least a score of riders, palpably in pursuit of the trio. In the wake of the pursuers bumped an automobile in which four men in white shirts were apparently urging the men to greater efforts. A number of tents at the head of the valley, several picketed horses and a lounging crowd of a dozen cowmen completed the picture, and after a moment's thought Bill understood.

"Red's movie outfit," he grunted, relaxing in the saddle and watching the performance with undisguised interest.

His curiosity overcoming him, he decided to stop over for an hour or so and view the proceedings from a closer range. Accordingly he reined Angelina Celestine down the steep declivity where her surefootedness stood her in excellent stead, for the going was rough and treacherous. On coming out of the chaparral at the foot of the incline he found that he was within a few hundred yards of the automobile and the cavalcade of horsemen, all of whom had halted and seemingly were holding a conference in the lee of a towering butte. At a jogtrot Bill drew near, but so engrossed were the director, his aids, the riders, and every one else, that they failed to notice his approach. Then Red Higgins, with his inevitable camera, came up, and his joyous greeting centered the attention of the crowd on Bill.

"Say, you pie-eyed palooka," he yelped, "you started somethin' yesterday. Didn't you know that Rojas' whole army is out lookin' for you—also ever' *rurale* between here and the coast? What got into you, anyhow, Bill?"

"A little too much of that cognac, I reckon," admitted Bill with a wry grin.

"Boys," called Red, turning to the crowd, "this is General Rojas' color-sergeant—the bird I was tellin' you about last night."

An admiring, curious circle gathered about them, and several of their number pushed forward, shaking hands with Bill, who, feeling ill at ease in the spotlight, dismounted and hitched Angelina Celestine to a wild pear tree.

"That mule," declared Red, moving to a respectful distance from its heels, "would clean up big at Tia Juana. She'd make chain lightnin' look like it was thrown in reverse. You sure stepped out of Quarteros in record time, Bill. Have any trouble with Rojas' *vaqueros* last night?"

"They stayed on my trail for a while," admitted Bill, "but I give 'em the slip durin' the night. I expect they're still workin' the Sierra Vegas country."

"Where are you headed now?" asked Red after a slight pause.

"Back to the Bar-Dollar."

Red wheeled and stepped close in to one of the men in the car, a thin, cadaverous, bald man of indeterminate age, who was chewing a long black cigar.

"Say, Mr. Hemmingway, you've been wantin' a double for the lead of this job—a man who can ride and rope." He waved toward Bill. "Here's your man—just made to order."

The director cast an appraising eye on Bill, and the inspection seemed to bring complete satisfaction, for he nodded in ready acquiescence.

"How about it, Bill?" queried Red hopefully. "We'll be through in a couple of days, and that'll be plenty of time to get back to your job. What do you say?"

"What will I be supposed to do?" asked Bill doubtfully.

"A little hard ridin', some fancy ropin', and a few things like that—nothin' but what you do ever' day. Come on, Bill! It's easy money."

Bill glanced toward the director, and the latter climbed out of the car.

"Name your price," he said shortly. "I'm going to use that scene Higgins shot in Quarteros yesterday, and to complete the picture I've got to have you and your mule in some other scenes. I've got to have you—and I usually get what I want."

"You've hired a man," returned Bill. "When do I start?"

Supplied with many blank cartridges, a plaited riata, and a startling, highly expensive sartorial outfit, the exact duplicate of that worn by the famous leading man, Bill rode, roped, and shot the hero, Buck McMahan, to everlasting glory. And Angelina Celestine seemed to sense her importance to the screen world, for she pranced and raced as she had never performed previously. Indeed, when work for the day ceased, Hemmingway offered Bellicose Bill a fabulous sum for her, but Bill was not even tempted.

SOON after supper Bill and Red retired to the latter's tent, where by the light of a gas torch they reminisced of other days, largely those just preceding the Argonne push. To this pleasant pastime came a sudden interruption in the form of six *rurales*, each carrying a high-powered rifle in readiness for instant action, and behind them appeared General Rojas himself, keeping well under the cover of the policemen's bodies.

In a flash Bill acted. He was sitting on a folding camp-chair behind the table when the tent-flap was opened, and with a single movement he leaped backward and at the same instant fired twice at the gas torch. With a smothered ejaculation he realized that his guns were loaded with blanks, and in desperation he plunged low against the canvas wall of the tent, felt it give before him, and then found himself plowing the sand outside.

As he came to his knees an avalanche of *rurales* fell on him, pinning him down beneath a weight which he was unable to shift, despite his frenzied efforts. Through the mêlée he could hear General Rojas shouting encouragement to his men, while there were sounds inside the tent that indicated that Red Higgins was making it interesting for several of the raiders. At last Bill, realizing that further resistance was futile, relaxed and permitted his captors to bind him with *riatas* until he was scarcely able to move a muscle. Then they carried him several hundred yards to the point where they had picketed their horses, and tied him firmly in the saddle of a wiry little mustang. A little later they were headed in the direction of Quarteros, grim and silent.

In the surprise and excitement of the attack Bill had not had time to consider the predicament into which he had been thrown, but the very silence and determination on the part of his captors made him realize that he might expect the worst. A swift trial before a military tribunal, which itself would be a farce on justice, and a firing squad before a whitewashed wall were inevitable, and not more than twenty-four hours distant, if that long.

The irony of a bandit avenging an insult to his flag and country—a flag which the avenger had irrevocably insulted by his very presence—struck Bill with such force that he laughed in a low and bitter tone which startled his two nearest captors, and they spurred close in beside him, evidently expecting some sudden *coup*.

The moon had risen when they reached Quarteros, flooding the landscape with a silvery sheen which outlined even distant objects with sharp clarity. The town was asleep save for a couple of saloons and dance halls, from which poured a small mob of men and women, who received the cavalcade with acclaim. Rojas and his following dismounted and pushed through into the most pretentious of the saloons, and Bill, to his surprise, was freed from his bonds and escorted inside. Almost instantly the floor was cleared

and a table and several chairs were placed in the center of the room.

One glance was sufficient for Bill to recognize the preparations as the preliminaries to the court-martial proceedings, and it was no surprise to see General Rojas assume the seat at the head of the table and the other members of his staff group themselves about him. Flanked on either side by the *rurales*, Bill was given a chair at the other end of the table, and amid an impressive silence one of the staff officers, a major by the insignia on his tunic, began to write rapidly. For the space of several pregnant minutes the only sound to reach Bill's ears was the scratching of the pen on the paper.

AT LAST the major ceased his efforts and glanced inquiringly at his chief. General Rojas nodded, and the major arose and in sonorous Spanish began to read his document, which was a brief résumé of the various and sundry charges against the prisoner. Although Bill's knowledge of the language did not include legal and military terminology, he did not experience great difficulty in following the meaning of the major's words. The charges included espionage, attempted assault upon the person of General Rojas, and ended with a scathing arraignment of the prisoner on the count of his offering a base insult to the great Republic of Mexico and its glorious banner. The accusation was worded in such a manner as to indicate that there were numerous other crimes which the prisoner had committed, but that the aforementioned charges were sufficient for all purposes as far as that court-martial was concerned.

"You have heard ze charge," declared Rojas in unexpectedly good English. "I suppose you weel deny heem?"

"It would be impossible," replied Bill in Spanish, so that all in the room could hear, "to insult a flag to which your portrait was fastened, Rojas."

The general's face went livid, and his hand stole toward his sash. For an instant it appeared that Bill's life was hanging in the balance. Then with a palpable effort Rojas controlled his anger and relaxed. The remainder of the trial was perfunctory, Rojas merely going through the formalities of a court-martial. Within ten minutes Bill found himself under a heavy guard and headed for the *cuartel*, with Rojas' sentence still ringing in his ears—"to be executed by a firing squad at dawn."

THE *cuartel* proved to be an adobe affair, and at first glance at the outside of the building Bill's hopes ran high. It ought to prove a comparatively easy matter to dig out through those walls and make a getaway. But once inside the prison Bill's idea underwent a change. One tier of the cells in the rear of the *cuartel* was made of a network of steel bars which would have defied a Houdini, and the door, heavy and studded with steel, would block the efforts of a mob for a considerable length of time. When the lock clicked behind Bill and the echoes of the footsteps of the *rurales* had died in the corridor, he sat down on the bunk and gazed about the bleak walls speculatively.

The bunk, a blanket much the worse for wear, and a frail chair composed the furnishings of the cell, and a minute inspection showed that the steel construction was faultless and would hold securely unless outside aid reached him. Try as he might, he could not find a single

loose fastening or joint through which he might make an opening, and with a sense of helplessness he sat down to await the coming of the dawn—and the firing squad.

Through the long hours of the night he remained almost motionless, hoping against hope that the luck which had always followed him would again come to his assistance. But as the hours passed and the breaking dawn drew near, he realized that he must face the inevitable. There was no hope upon which he could place any dependence. The only friend he had on that side of the border was Red Higgins, but what could Red do in the face of Rojas' army? True, there was the bare possibility that he might have ridden to the border and telephoned to the Bar-Dollar, but even if he had done this, it would still be a physical impossibility for that outfit to ride to Quarteros by daybreak.

FROM somewhere nearby came the crow of a cock heralding the approach of dawn, and a few minutes later a rainstorm of unusual intensity broke over the town. For perhaps a quarter of an hour Bill leaned against the rear wall of the cell, listening to the rain on the corrugated iron roof overhead and wondering when the *rurales* would come for him. Slowly the impenetrable darkness outside began to grow gray, and the rain died down to a steady drizzle. Through the opaque mists the eastern horizon began to assume its outlines, and somewhere in the distance a bell called the peons to early mass. And still the *rurales* failed to put in their appearance.

WITH surprising suddenness the rays of the sun shot across the range of hills to the east, and the rain ceased, although the clouds were still massed and lowering overhead. Almost at the same time the *rurales* came trooping down the corridor, and without a word they unlocked the door and led the prisoner out into the *patio*, at the far side of which stood a whitewashed wall about eight feet high. Bill halted momentarily in the doorway and stared intently at the scene.

The firing squad, in charge of a young lieutenant, stood at attention a few yards from the gate, and near it General Rojas and five or six members of his staff were gathered in the lee of the wall, drawing their coats close about them to keep out the damp chill of the early morning. Approximately a dozen idlers, in various attitudes of curious waiting, made up the remainder of the spectators, and Bill, determined that none of them should see the weakness he felt and the chill that had settled about his heart, straightened his shoulders and with a firm, steady step advanced toward that wall. Before he had traversed half the distance he came to a sudden halt and stared unbelievingly at something which had escaped his eye.

A man was standing beside some object covered with a tarpaulin, or *poncho*, to keep out the rain and dampness, but his face was turned toward Rojas as if awaiting a signal from the latter. Bill blinked his eyes and stared. No, there could be no mistake. It was Red Higgins and his camera. But what on earth could that mean? Why was Red there, with his camera? To take a shot of the execution? Bill could hardly believe that, yet——

"Hello, Red!" Bill waved airily.

Red nodded and came forward to meet Bill, offering his hand. Rojas and his officers, apparently suspicious of the two, came swiftly toward them.

"General Rojas," explained Red,

half turning his face away, "wants to show his constituency how he avenged the insult to his country's flag. I'm takin' this shot for him. That's why he waited for sunrise."

"All right, Red."

With an effort Bill kept his voice even though the smile he forced must have been a sickly thing. His old pal, Red Higgins, the man with whom he had bunked through France, would do that? Sell his soul to Rojas for a few *pesos?* It was unbelievable.

With an ironical, bitter smile Bill advanced to the wall and wheeled. Then, with a nonchalance that defied penetration, he rolled and lighted a cigarette as the firing squad moved into position. They aligned themselves ten yards away, the lieutenant marched out and to one side, and Red Higgins stepped behind his camera and reached for the tarpaulin which covered it.

Bill shot one quick glance at Red, and his heart leaped. Red, with a swift movement, swept the covering from his "camera," exposing an object at which Bill needed but one glance. It was a machine-gun, its deadly barrel trained directly on the firing squad.

With a shout of joy Bill dived to Red's assistance, and at the same instant he heard that gun spit a paralyzing crackle of shots. Firing pointblank at the firing squad, Red surprised them into dropping their guns and raising their hands in quick surrender. Rojas and his staff dashed pellmell toward the gate, only to be suddenly confronted by a trio of the loungers with automatics, evidently placed there by Red. Between two fires, Rojas and his officers offered no further resistance.

With all dispatch Red and Bill locked Rojas and his men in the *cuartel,* and then Red led the way out into the street and down an alley where five horses and Angelina Celestine were picketed to a corral fence. In the saddle, they lost no time in heading for the open country in the direction of the border.

TWO miles out of Quarteros, Bill reined Angelina Celestine close in beside Red.

"Red, I'm apologizin' for what I thought when I saw y'u waitin' with yore 'camera' a few minutes ago. Y'u've done me a turn I ain't forgettin'."

"I owed you that, Bill," returned Red. "We're square on that rescue act you pulled for my benefit in France."

"But what I want to know, Red," puzzled Bill, "is where y'u got that machine-gun."

"Movie property. We've been usin' it on the job we've just been shootin'."

"But Rojas will capture it and be on our trails in a few minutes."

"Let him. The drums are filled with blanks. That's the only kind the movies use, you know."

Long Shadows

By KATHARINE HAVILAND TAYLOR

A SERIAL—PART IV*

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED:

ANGELICA BURKE, whose mother has just died, comes on the steamship *Atlantis* from Europe, where she has lived for years, to Long Shadows, the New Jersey home of her AUNT AGNES. Her aunt and her eldest cousin, ROGER GARRISON, are so kindly and cheerful that the girl is immediately put at her ease, though she is rather distressed by WILLIAM, the surly youngest of the three cousins, and by PERCIVAL, who is mentally unbalanced. TOKI, the Japanese servant, and JANETTE, Percival's nurse, arouse in her a feeling of distrust.

Angelica is assigned to the East Room, which is said to be haunted by a ghost on moonless nights. During the first night BLAKE CHESTER, an old friend, commits suicide on the porch—with Roger's dagger, which has on it a curious emblem of three monkeys. Also, THEODORE CASSELL, purser of the *Atlantis*, who had given Angelica some gossip and letters for her aunt, disappears.

A letter which throws suspicion on the relations between Angelica's mother and Blake Chester is discovered among his belongings. Angelica is introduced to ROY, a disagreeable youth who works under William at the telegraph office. Later, Angelica gives an envelope engraved with Blake Chester's name, which she has found in the piano, the top of which is supposed to have been nailed shut for twenty years, to DR. FIELD, a pleasant young man who has attended her and won her confidence. He opens it, finds in it twenty one-thousand-dollar bills, and takes charge of the money. He promises to come back for her at six o'clock, to take her away from that horrible house, but—he does not come back.

* This serial began in the November, 1927, issue of MYSTERY STORIES. Copies of back issues will be sent anywhere in the United States on receipt of twenty-five cents each.

Instead, William reports that on his way home he saw Dr. Field in an ambulance, struggling with an unruly patient. Angelica is terribly upset by the news, and determines to phone Dr. Field to find out if everything's all right. But before she can do so she overhears Janette and Percival say that Dr. Field has left for South America—and hint that he may have been murdered.

During the night there are horrible screams. But, though the household stays up till five o'clock, unable to sleep through sheer terror, the source of the disturbance is not determined.

The next day, almost exhausted by the strange events that have transpired, Angelica determines to consult a detective agency. She tells her aunt, who is very nervous and clings to her all the time, that she is going in to Philadelphia to do some shopping. Then she slips into her bag a veil and a soft little crush hat. Her coat is reversible, for she plans to disguise herself before she goes to the agency.

A half-hour later she is waiting at the station for what the ticket clerk calls "the three o'clock local."

And now go on with the story.

CHAPTER XI

LATE AFTERNOON AND EVENING

IN WEST PHILADELPHIA I went to the women's room in the station, where it was easy, though a bit cramped, secretly to make the changes I had thought wise to make in my attire. When I emerged from the small, cupboard-like apartment, I was happy to see, in a long mirror which I faced, that I was really quite a different person from the one who had entered that compartment. The attendant was sitting by a table on which were towels, reading. She did not even glance up at me. I hurried on. I took a taxi to a huge shop called Wanamaker's first. And after I had gone up in one elevator and made a few purchases and come down in another, I felt safe. No one was following me, I felt certain. The faces in the shifting crowd were different, and no one face peered at me with more than a casual interest.

Outside, I had the doorman hail another taxi for me. And as the taxi slurred to the curb to stop, I asked of the doorman whether there was not a bank in the Dartmouth building, which was the one I was seeking and the one I must reach.

"The First Central National," he answered.

I tipped him, said: "The First Central National, Dartmouth Building," to the driver, and stepped into the chugging machine. Thus far, I felt, all had gone well.

FORTUNATELY, the elevator in the Dartmouth Building was empty. I had taken the precaution of searching on the board for the name of another office which was on the same floor as was the Waters-Sims Detective Bureau; and as we went up I asked of the uniformed girl who ran the lift whether or not the offices of the South American Mines Company were on the floor I had given her as my stop.

She said a casual "Yes, eighth," and the elevator stopped. "Right around the corner," she sang out tinnily as I stepped out.

I thanked her and went on. The elevator went down and the hall was empty. I hurried on for a few steps, and then I saw the door I sought and went in.

The man who attended to me in

the Waters-Sims Detective Bureau was exactly the type that I had hoped to find. He listened to my tale without surprise, even hearing with calm my rather shaken confidence about the blue light in the closet. He took down all the items that I gave to him, and only when I stood up did he speak. Then he said:

"You must stay a little longer at Long Shadows, Miss Burke. That will be absolutely necessary. Are you brave enough to do that, if I tell you that every precaution will be taken to insure your safety?"

"I will stay," I assured him.

He nodded. "Good!" he said boomingly. Then he added: "We'll locate Dr. James T. Field, I'm certain."

I drew a deep breath. "I'm almost as anxious to locate him," I admitted, "as I am to clear my mother's name of—of this stain."

"Have you confided in any one?" my inquisitor questioned.

I said that, with the exception of Dr. Field, I had not.

"Good!" he said again. "Follow that course. Keep your own counsel, and we'll try to make short work of the solving of this riddle."

I thanked him, and then I left. Once more I followed a devious and careful course. And by the time I reached the station—again garbed as the girl who had quitted it—I felt that everything had gone well and as I had planned it.

And now for the rise of my courage—and more time at Long Shadows. How much more time, I wondered—how much—more time?

ROGER was at home and with his mother in the drawing-room, and I saw that he was white and shaken. His mother, almost equally upset, was pacing the floor rather tremblingly. I dumped some small packets, which I had been wise enough to accumulate, upon a chair. The tea things were still upon the cart; and the tea in the two cups, I saw, had hardly been touched.

"Dear, sit down," my aunt ordered.

I settled. She kept up her restless moving.

"Roger has bad news for you," she went on. "We are going to do everything we can to help you with this trouble, for, as Roger says, it is his fault. . . . Why *did* you forget it?" she ended, turning to him, her voice strident and shaking.

"Oh, d-don't ask me th—that!" he almost whimpered in answer. "C-can't you s-see how I f-feel my indiscretion *n-now?*"

"What is it?" I asked.

They told me: Roger had slipped the note I'd written him in a drawer of his office desk; some one—with a mind that was capable of evil design and plot—had found this note of mine, and that some one, too, knew of the aspersion that had been set upon my mother through Blake Chester's suicide.

"H-here's his note that was l-left in p-place of yours," said Roger feebly.

My hands trembling, I took the bit of coarse, flaking gray paper that he held out to me, and on it I read:

> Doubtless the world—through pink-tinted Sunday papers and their kin, always hungry for news—would relish this morsel which confesses that Angelina Burke, the daughter of her mother's *friend*, Blake Chester, spent the night with her esteemed cousin, as is confessed in a letter that is now held by one who will relinquish the document upon receipt of ten thousand dollars, cash.

I read on, a word about where this could be left. And the time

limit: one day, I had for settling. Then the fat would be in the fire, as the letter said. "Consider," the letter had in its post-script, "such headlines as 'Like Mother, Like Daughter. Is the Taint at Long Shadows, or in the Blood?' "

I looked up from the letter and at Roger, who was totally unnerved.

My aunt said a strident, strained "What do you think of it, Angelica? Are you going to heed it?"

Again I looked down at the letter which promised to make public this whisper about my mother. And whispers, once they had slipped into headlines, I realized, were too often credited as true.

"It must be stopped," I stated.

My aunt drew a deep, relieved breath.

"I have been in agony," she confessed, "over the thought of this tale's getting out; over the thought of the woman who was—my little sister—being branded and gossiped about in this way. I am even more anxious to have the settlement made than are you, Angelica."

"Th-the t-trouble is," said Roger, who was still very white, "th-that I c-can r-raise only f-five thousand just now. I-I've h-had a bad y-year s-so f-far."

"It isn't your matter," I responded.

He answered aggressively with: "I'd l-like to kn-know w-why n-not?"

"I wrote the letter," I pointed out, "and it is my mother I am protecting."

"And it was m-my c-carelessness th-that m-made this t-trouble!" said Roger to that.

"Exactly!" my aunt agreed testily. "You will pay that five thousand, Roger, and the rest when you can raise it."

I contested this hotly, and I told them that my letter of credit was for exactly ten thousand dollars and that I had enough in cash with me to carry me over until I made other arrangements. Still Roger insisted that he pay the five thousand, and after a bit I gave in. I had to, because of my aunt's worry and her feeling that the whole responsibility for the miserable affair had been Roger's; but I made up my mind that I would return that five thousand dollars to Roger, even if I had to do so without my aunt's knowledge, and that the first time we were alone together I would tell him of my intention.

"HOW big is your office force?" I questioned, after Roger had again taken charge of the letter and had slipped it into his pocket.

"S-small," he admitted, "b-but the trouble is, I h-have about h-half a hundred f-friends who s-seem to use my office as a c-club."

"You would have," I thought, as I looked at his kind face, which was now stripped of its usual good-natured geniality by the worry that had gripped him.

"A-and those f-friends b-bring *their* f-friends!" he went on. "I w-went in the o-other d-day, t-to find t-two men I'd n-never s-seen before s-sitting in my inner office, w-waiting for Vance Harding, and o-one of 'em g-got up as I c-came in, and said: 'Wh-what c-can I d-do for you?' "

I found my lips shaped to a pinched smile. Roger was bound to be used by his friends and by every one's friends, I felt; and no wonder he wasn't, as he admitted to me, "m-much of a b-business s-success"!

"When were these men there?" my aunt questioned sharply.

"Wh-why, yesterday," he answered with guileless surprise and a rise of perturbation that made me

want to protect him, whose kind nature could indulge a suspicion of no one!

My aunt laughed mirthlessly and rather cuttingly.

"Vance Harding," she said, "started for the Orient last month. If those 'friends' of his were waiting for him, they would have a long wait. He plans to be gone a year. Would you know them if you saw them again, Roger?"

Now he looked the small boy who has been caught with his hands in the cooky jar. He answered in an undertone: "I am a fool, and I d-don't know that I *w-would* know them! They h-had the shades down and were h-having a d-drink. I h-had one, too, with them. They s-seemed such n-nice fellows! We t-talked of Vance, and f-finally they said they wouldn't w-wait for him any l-longer, and l-left."

"Roger, you *are* a fool," my aunt said cuttingly. "Why did your secretary let those men in?"

"Th-they had Vance Harding's card w-with a l-line on it," Roger answered.

"Easy enough for any one who makes a habit of forgery and blackmail and such—and they go together—to get that card and write that line," my aunt pointed out. "If they had *known* the inner circle as well as they *use* them, they would have known that Vance Harding is not in this country at the present!"

"Th-that's so," Roger agreed, crestfallen.

"You'll always trust the whole world and his brother and his second cousin," I thought, looking at Roger, and it hurt me cruelly to see him so hurt by awakening to the fact that all the fellows who seemed nice were *not* "such n-nice fellows."

"W-well, I'll s-settle in t-time," Roger promised, and I saw long lines, not usually there, stand out around his lips, and his pallor increased.

"You'll do nothing of the sort!" I contested, and I spoke almost as sharply as had my aunt when she told Roger he was a fool.

"Y-yes, I *w-will*, Angelica," he assured me solemnly.

"And he'll be punished for his carelessness in other ways, too," my aunt asserted, and I felt unmercifully. "Lord, how William the cautious and the sane—William, who knows no such predicaments—how William will rub it in!"

"I don't want him to know of it," I said.

Roger, frowning, said he hated secrecy; but I insisted, and after a moment I brought my aunt to my point of view, and I made Roger, still unwilling, agree that he would keep silence, and we would keep this affair, which was ours, to ourselves.

DINNER was anything but a pleasant meal. My aunt and Roger were oppressed by the situation that had been made by my foolish letter and Roger's bland trust. And my aunt was now acutely worried over Roy, and that worry she dared air—and she did.

Roger had had no response to his inquiring wire, and my aunt asked William a round dozen of questions about the motor in which Roy had ridden away, after having accepted the offered "lift."

William fidgeted and frowned, exceedingly bored and irritated, and when she almost wailed: "Where is he now?" he replied: "Perhaps, considering Roy and his ideas of entertainment, it is quite as well that you do not know, Mother." And as he said that, I saw a gleam in Toki's eyes and a twitch at his lips. Enjoyment of William's rather doubt-

ful statement, I wondered, or did he know something of the motor in which Roy had ridden, and where that motor had gone?

"I want the evening's paper, Toki," said my aunt. And, waiting, she attempted to rub the lines of worry from her forehead with her slender, patrician fingers.

Toki brought it in a second; my aunt took it from the tray with an absent "Thank you."

"No doubt Roy's disappearance will cause quite a stir," William commented sarcastically.

"A-anything about C-Cassell?" Roger asked.

"No fresh clues," my aunt answered, "and only a half-inch notice. His disappearance is getting old. A few days and every one but his wondering friends will have forgotten."

"I s-suppose so," Roger agreed in a depressed way, "b-but it's h-hard to believe!"

"HERE," said my aunt loudly, and she leaned over the table in order to get upon her paper a better concentration of the light from the many candles—"here, William, is an item that will interest you. Your old friend Machibu has committed hara-kiri."

"Wh-what's that?" Roger questioned.

"Turn on the lights, please, Toki," William ordered; and, turning to his mother, he said admonishingly: "You can't be too careful of your eyes, you know. We are given but two."

The switch that Toki turned was by the passageway that led to the kitchen—that passageway in which was the telephone cabinet. I saw him sway after he had twisted the button which, with a turn, flooded the room with light, and I saw him skulking in the passageway after he had done this, waiting there, listening.

"You should be careful of your feet," I thought, "while you do that." I saw the toe of one of Toki's small, slender boots.

"Wh-what is h-hara-kiri?" Roger repeated.

"It is the favorite method of suicide with the Japanese," William explained in his precise way, after a look toward the door that led into the passageway—a look that had evidently made him think Toki was in the kitchen and out of hearing. "The nobles and persons of high degree and rank usually employ it. There is a special hara-kiri knife made, and with that they pierce deep into the abdomen and then make a circular motion," and, upon himself, he illustrated this.

"Disembowel themselves. Frightfully unpleasant," my aunt added to William's explanation.

"Y-you s-seem to know a l-lot about it, William," Roger commented.

"And the item?" William prompted.

"Well, your friend Machibu committed hara-kiri," my aunt said, her gaze moving up and down the paragraph as she spoke. "He had fallen in love with a geisha girl, it says, and knowing that they couldn't marry—but I'll read it: 'The young people, knowing that marriage would be forbidden because of the difference in rank, decided to commit suicide in the Sacred Lake of the White Heart, which is near——' Now, who cares what it's near?" my aunt broke in on her reading to question.

"Is he dead?" William asked, his voice a little thick.

"No, I think not. Wait. 'They therefore entered the waters hand

in hand, wading slowly toward the deepest point. A moment before they reached this, young Machibu tied to the girl the anchor she desired attached to her body, and, stepping over a ledge, she sank. He swam for shore, and there, realizing what he had done, he attempted hara-kiri. Intervention of a bystander has prevented fatality, it is thought. Hopes are held out for the recovery of Machibu——' "

"Good God!" William gasped.

"Pretty story," my aunt murmured. "'And so—are the mighty fallen,'" and she laughed unpleasantly.

TOKI came in, carrying a tall-stemmed glass which held chocolate mousse, on his gleaming, silver tray. He set it before my aunt.

"Give that to my niece, Toki," said my aunt. "I shall not have any to-night. I am so upset about —Roy." She smiled at me wanly; thus telling me that Roy made but a part of her worry.

Toki picked up the glass. *I saw him deliberately tilt his tray until the glass slid to the floor,* and I knew that a poison or a drug had been in it and that only an accident had saved my dear aunt.

"Thousand pardons," he murmured. "Too very awkward. Am abased."

"You ought to be," said my aunt sharply. "You were extremely careless. And of course you had to break crystal!"

"Isn't that sufficient, Mother?" William asked of her severely. "Toki has apologized."

"Y-you are s-speaking to your m-mother," Roger reminded William.

William stood up, rigid with anger, and, turning to Roger, he asked whether it was Roger's place to discipline him.

"I d-don't want to," said Roger.

William glared at Roger, started to speak, set his teeth, and then hurried toward the door. At the door he whirled to face the uncomfortable group around the table as he spoke.

"Tell Toki to come to my room as soon as possible. I wish to speak to him," he ordered, and then he was gone.

My aunt sighed. "How very unpleasant!" she murmured.

"I'm s-sorry, Angelica," Roger apologized.

I MADE some polite response that I hope was not untactful. My aunt stood up. We followed her to the drawing-room, and there we settled around the fire. My aunt took up her knitting. I could not help but glance rather frequently toward the piano. What was in it, if anything, now? I kept wondering how soon I should have a report from the Waters-Sims bureau. And I wondered, too, with a chill of spine, how soon they could tell me anything—even the unwelcome—about Dr. Field, something of how the accumulation of mystery would read to those whose business it was to solve mysteries.

Toki, strangely white and shaken, came to bring coffee. A little later he appeared to summon Roger to the telephone. Then I noticed my aunt fumbling through her bag for something she lacked. I asked her what she needed, and she told me she wanted finer needles.

"Let me get them," I offered. But I was sorry I had made the offer when she answered with "Very well, dear child. They're in the little room at the end of the hall."

"The little room"—and I knew now that that was the Garrisons' name for that small room in which I had seen the body of Blake Chester!

"The switch is right inside the

door, dear," said my aunt, "to the left."

I hurried down the hall, scolding myself soundly as I made my way. I was a coward, I decided, to hate going to that room as I did. The world was wide awake and close to me. My aunt was within hail in the drawing-room I had quitted, while Roger was but a few feet away and in the telephone cabinet. And as I thought that, I heard Roger's voice from the dining-room.

"It w-was R-Roy," he announced happily. "He w-was g-good enough to t-telephone. B-bad connection, but he's all right—I g-got that——"

I said: "I'm so glad!" and he hurried past me and on to his mother. And I was more than a little disconcerted to see him close the drawing-room door after himself.

I hesitated at the door of "the little room," which was closed. It seemed to me that I heard a sound back of that door. I thought, growing tense: "You are a fool." I opened the door to step within. Had my aunt said that the switch was to the right of the door or to the left? My groping hand sought the switch. I knew suddenly that something, or some one, was in the room waiting for me—in the dark.

I opened my mouth to scream. A hand was over it. My knees went weak. I felt myself held. I heard the door close back of me, and I heard the key turn in it. Percival? Janette? I wondered.

"I mustn't faint," I thought. "I mustn't—faint——"

Suddenly before my horrified eyes I saw that growing, blue light which had upstairs terrified me as it had grown strong and outlined that closet door. The light was back of the lounge upon which the body of Blake Chester had lain. I saw again—in the growing light—that body which had been taken by the coroner from the house. I knew it had been taken by the coroner from the house, yet before me—before me—lay the body I had seen before—Blake Chester's body stretched long and stiff under the same sheet that had covered it the morning before.

I tried to struggle free. The thing that held me—a strong, relentless hand clamped over my mouth—was behind me. I heard hard, rasping breathing. Then, as my head swam, I felt myself released. I wondered, as I swayed, what was to be for me now?

I saw the body on the lounge rise slowly—it was coming toward *me*—and then—through my dwindling consciousness I heard, faintly: "*Not yet. Wait.*"

CHAPTER XII

THE FIRST HALF OF THE THIRD NIGHT

WHEN I came back to consciousness the room was empty and glaring with light, and *I lay on that lounge*. I struggled up, dripping with sweat. Sick and dizzy, I crept toward the door. I cowered against that door, my eyes—still seeing black and white spots, still giving to my numbed brain a world that whirled—fixed upon that lounge. Nothing was on it. *Nothing*. Yet I had not dreamed the moments which had seemed hours. The hand upon my mouth had been too real. Slowly—I was still half stupefied—I glanced toward the table. And my heart lost a beat and I gasped as I saw upon the table that thing that I knew from the lips of Janette and Percival as "the emblem": the three small monkeys.

My hands were palsied and without strength. The knob of the door turned hard. Was some one holding it in the hall? I lost every vestige of strength at the thought and, sob-

bing, I sagged against the door, whimpering: "Please—please——"

Then again I tried the knob. It turned and—I was outside the room in which I had seen a ghost and felt the rigidly strong grip of a living man. I felt a rush of cold air. Where had it come from in that small room which was so tightly closed? It carried the door shut. Had I not held it, it would have slammed.

I paused a minute to gather strength. I would go back to the drawing-room, where I would tell my aunt I couldn't find her knitting needles. I would not, with my confession of that which I knew had been, make her believe me mad! There must be, in no one's mind, a doubt of my sanity, for my testimony of what I had seen happen in the house would, doubtless, be demanded, and it must come from one who had not prattled hysterically of ghosts, and of bodies which had been carried from the house. And, too, silence had been demanded of me by the man I had seen that day in the Waters-Sims Detective Bureau, and who was now working for me. I was to confide in no one—no one! Absolute quiet from me, no matter what further horrors came to me: that had been ordered by the man who was now, I hoped, working on "the case."

And, shaking there, outside that door, I said a little prayer that asked for strength—enough strength to carry me through — whatever more tests were written for me in the evil stars. A little steadiness came back to me. Janette or Percival, I wondered, or both? But, looking up then, I found my assailant could have been neither Janette nor Percival, for, together, they were coming down the stairs.

"We are—coming down—for coffee, 'said the Spider to the Fly,'" chanted Percival as he saw me.

I noticed—through eyes that still made for me a world that reeled—Janette's sneering smile.

STILL trembling, I entered the drawing-room before Janette and Percival. Percival bowed with mocking courtesy as he stood aside to let me pass him, and this brought out Janette's ironic, leering, mirthless laugh.

My aunt, looking up, said a surprised "Ah, Percival! How nice to have you with us! I'm so glad you feel better, dear."

He chanted: "Thank you — dear and—gentle lady," and a sneer seared his words.

"N-now, Percival," said Roger.

"I want—to show—Angelica how —strong I am," Percival chanted now. "I can make her—by a twist of her arm—go to her knees—and stay there!"

"That would hardly be a pretty game to play with a lady," said my aunt easily, and she added in an undertone to Janette: "Has he been this way all day?"

And Janette nodded, smiling slyly, her eyes on me.

PERCIVAL sat with us until a little after ten; sat forward, hunched over, hardly looking away from me. My aunt spoke once or twice to him of staring and then she gave it up.

"I hope you don't mind, Angelica," she said to me at length in an undertone, "for I really can't blame him—and he has always had a super-sensitive and almost passionate love for the beautiful."

Janette, without whom Percival was "uneasy" when "not well," sat in a corner knitting a scarf of blood red—I hated the hue—and she, too, watched me

"Give—Cousin Angelica—a sleeping tablet—to-night," said Percival just after the clock had boomed out ten slow strokes. "She is"—he stopped to laugh silently and long—"she is," he repeated, "a little nervous——"

"I believe it would be a good idea," my aunt agreed as she stooped to recover a rolling ball of wool.

"But I shall not take it," I inwardly decided, looking at Percival. "You may think I will—I shall let you think I will take it—but I shall not," I thought. Aloud I said: "I believe I should like one. I haven't slept well lately."

"I'll give it to you when we go up," said my aunt.

"See that—she takes it," Percival insisted.

"Promise," said my aunt.

I did some quick thinking. I had some aspirin tablets in my night-case—my mother had developed that habit before her death. If my aunt were serious about her promise to Percival, and looked on as I took the tablet that Percival so wanted me to have, I might be able to swallow one of the aspirin tablets without my aunt's knowing I had substituted this for the one she had given me. And if I could do this, everything would be well. Then, wide awake, I would know what went on in the dark, while the others thought me drugged.

William came down the stairs; his coat over his arm, he appeared in the drawing-room doorway.

"I'm going out," he announced shortly.

"Don't be late, dear," my aunt called after him.

The only answer was the slam of the front door, which did not latch unless slammed.

"W-well, I s-suggest we t-turn in," Roger said.

My aunt rolled up her knitting, sticking the needles through it in the methodical way of a domestically attuned woman. Janette stood up.

"Come, lamb," she said to Percival. "It's time for us to begin a good long night of sleeping."

"Of—sleeping," he repeated. He, too, stood up. "Pleasant—dreams—Angelica," he said to me. "*Pleasant*—dreams."

And he left, laughing.

I RAN up the stairs ahead of my aunt and Roger. I found an aspirin tablet and cupped it in my palm, and then I waited.

My aunt went to her room, and then she came back.

"Here, dear," she said, holding out the pill. "I'm going to see you take it, if you don't mind; because, you see, I promised Percival that I would, and to-morrow he will ask me whether I did see you take it. And one does not lie to a child. Percival is that, you know—*a child*," she ended, not quite steadily.

"Is he?" I thought.

She held out the pellet. I took it. Roger tapped on my door.

"Will you open that?" I asked.

Then I looked in my palm. The pills were of almost the same shape. I slipped her pill between my fingers; and how I thanked providence for the fact that in childhood I had been fond of "magic" and "sleight-of-hand." What fumbling at that moment might have cost me, I dared not think. But—I had not fumbled; my own inoffensive tablet lay in my palm.

"We're seeing that Angelica takes her dose like a good girl," said my aunt lightly. "Get her a glass of water, please, dear."

Roger poured the glass of water from a carafe that was on a small table by my bed. And I swallowed—the aspirin tablet.

"N-now you'll h-have pleasant

d-dreams," Roger said, smiling down at me.

"Yes," I answered; "I'm sure I shall."

"I s-stepped over to say I th-think I can r-raise six thousand," Roger went on. "I've been th-thinking of w-ways and m-means all e-evening. And I th-think I can d-do that b-by n-noon to-morrow."

I contested this, but I purposely contested it in a voice that I made thick and slow, and I let my eyelids sag.

"Get to bed, child," said my aunt, and then to Roger she added: "We must get on. The tablet is going to take quick effect. Not used to medicines, are you, dear?"

I said I wasn't.

She nodded. "That makes the effect very rapid," she said.

She kissed me, and Roger kissed me. They left, and I locked my door. I would go to bed. I would pretend to sleep. I would—wait. And I would wait even if waiting meant death for me. For something—something, I knew, would be revealed to me that night, my third—my third night at Long Shadows.

I TURNED off my light and lay down. The clock in the hall struck eleven. My door was opening. I opened my eyes a slit to see—Roger's fat form, outlined by the faint light in the hall.

"C-come in," he whispered to some one who followed him. "It's all right."

My aunt's voice said: "I hope she doesn't keep her bags locked." Then: "You're certain she's sleeping, Roger?"

He came to my bed and shook me: "Y-you know what you g-gave her," he said.

I heard them going through my things. "Plant it well," my aunt advised.

"C-can't I turn on the lights?" Roger asked. "Th-this f-flash l-light is w-weak."

"And have some one from the roadway report a light in this room at this hour, and so start her wondering?" my aunt answered acidly.

"Th-that's so," Roger agreed.

I heard them drag my suitcase from the cupboard.

"W-what do you s-suppose that s-scream was this afternoon?" Roger asked.

"I don't know," my aunt admitted, "but I think Toki knows."

Roger laughed. "He w-will l-leave at the end of the m-month," he stated in his soft and gentle way, "and h-he will *n-not* come back!"

"A lot can happen in a month," my aunt muttered.

"W-we'll t-talk of th-that in your r-room," Roger said.

Suddenly my aunt screamed. Fortunately for me, Roger was absorbed in her, for I jumped.

"I saw Field's face at that window!" she wailed. *"I saw Field's face!"*

"Sh-shut up!" Roger ordered.

There was an interval that was filled with my aunt's hard breathing.

"Wh-which window?" Roger whispered.

"The one—that is not—over the porch!" she gasped.

"Y-you're nervous," Roger told her, but his voice shook. "H-how could you s-see Field's face? Y-you know he's gone——"

"His *ghost!*" she whimpered. "I saw his face—I saw his face—at the east—window!"

Roger led her from the room.

"I'll f-finish l-later," he told her.

With what? I wondered. He closed the door after him. I heard

the key turn—the key he had to the East Room. I lay trembling. What had been "planted" in my things? What were they doing—in my things? How had they killed Field, who could only have been seen now if his ghost stalked? I realized suddenly that he meant more to me than had any man before. And he was gone, and I had helped to kill him!

I HEARD the east window being raised—slowly, cautiously. I saw against the gray of the night a form appear. The window was closed even more slowly and cautiously.

"Quiet—quiet," I heard—and in Dr. Field's voice, warm, vibrant, and *alive!*

He groped his way to my bedside. I held his hands with both of mine, and they were warm and living. Suddenly he kissed my clinging hands—both of them!

"A little more," he comforted. "A little more—and you will be free of everything that has hurt you, dear—free of everything!"

For a moment I clung tightly to his hands, then I heard him drop to the floor. A second and I knew he was hidden beneath the valance of my bed. Roger again opened the door. His mother followed him, whimpering.

"Y-you know he's dead," said Roger, "but if y-you l-like, I'll s-see whether anything is amiss in h-here. I'll be l-looking everywhere, anyway—she'll s-seem the b-better criminal for h-hiding things in odd places."

"I thought that valance moved," said my aunt.

"Oh, for G-God's sake!" Roger said sharply. "Y-you're m-making me n-nervous. But if you l-like, I'll look."

And I heard him coming toward the bed.

CHAPTER XIII

THE SECOND HALF OF THE THIRD NIGHT

WAITED, rigid, trying to keep my shortened, hard breathing from being audible. If Roger pulled aside the valance—what then? Would it mean the end for James Field, who had in some way, up to this point, escaped the doom that had been planned for him? I heard Roger's breathing; should I stop his hand with the grip of mine? He was stooping——

Then—then from the hall came a wild cry, and I knew it was made by William, although all the precision that usually marked his speech was gone from the call.

"Mother! Mother! Roger!" came in William's voice.

"Now, what?" my aunt whispered—her whisper made piercing and shrill by fright.

"We'll have to g-get out of h-here," Roger whispered in return.

They tiptoed to the door. I heard William coming up the stair. Roger closed the door after him. I heard my aunt scream. Then a frightful silence.

A hand reached from beneath the bed to grip mine. The east window was being raised again, even more slowly than it had been raised earlier that night, and with the most infinite caution. "Don't be frightened," I heard a whisper below me; and then in a tone that was a little louder: "Coast clear. Come in."

Again I saw, against the gray of the night, a figure outlined. I saw the compressed, hunched-up movement that took this figure over the sill and into my room. For a second time the window was stealthily closed and the form moved toward the bed. I tightened my grip on Dr. Field's hand.

"Remember, you have had a sleeping tablet," I heard from above me, "and *don't forget it.*"

And then I heard, from below me: "Where are you going?" and the newcomer, a moving black blotch in the gray of the room, answered with a short "Closet."

"It's close to two," I warned.

"There is no ghost," James Field told me in a lower whisper. The closet door was opened and closed. Again my door into the hall opened. The light from the hall outlined Roger once more—*and in his hand was that long dagger I had seen among Percival's "treasures." Roger came toward the bed and—me.* I could feel that dagger going deep into my heart. I *must* scream. I *must!* I gasped.

Then, while the breath crowded my lungs, I heard my aunt say: "Put it in an unlikely place. Make it seem as if she had been careful about hiding it. And watch the *blood*—don't let it *drip on you.*"

"I'll w-watch," Roger assured her.

WILLIAM followed him, sobbing. "You *shan't* do it!" he protested hysterically. "I tell you I saw Toki skulk away from the steps. I was coming up the drive. I saw him in the moonlight on the step. I ran to catch him, but it was—too late. *Why* do you want to leave that thing in Angelica's room?"

"D-do you w-want to swing for murder?" Roger questioned in his old, soft way. I heard him move my bureau. "B-better to h-have the authorities b-believe she d-did it, if they m-must b-believe s-some one did it—and they a-always l-love to b-believe *some* one did it—and sh-she will r-remember your ac-acquaintance with the method of h-hara-kiri from y-your illuminating t-talk of it at d-dinner. And perhaps she w-will help to convict *y-you* by t-telling of all you s-said of how hara-kiri is d-done. Then, t-too, you s-spoke disparagingly of Roy, and sh-she could r-remember that to h-hold against y-you. A-and she s-saw you g-go out——"

"But we *know* she didn't do it!" William stated, his voice shrill and high. "Why, to get *me* out of a hole, would you involve a girl we *know* to be innocent?"

Roger laughed.

"Don't be a fool, William," my aunt said. "You want to live."

"But look here"—William was gasping so that he could hardly speak—"I know—something of why—Toki went mad."

"How much?" my aunt asked, and I never heard so ominous and threatening a tone. "Let us hear how much you know—or *think* you know. Have you let that Jap, who has been showing signs of his insanity for months, persuade you that *we* are implicated?"

"We?" William echoed. "Who are 'we'?"

"K-keep quiet, Mother," Roger ordered.

William turned on Roger. "You will never let any one believe that girl had anything to do with Roy's condition while I live," he stated. "I should rather be hanged than have her—guiltless—hanged. Are you *mad?*" he ended.

PERCIVAL entered the room.

"No—he is not—mad," he stated in his slow, chanting way. "Only those who must—watch him—and his work—go mad."

"You kn-know what will h-happen to you?" Roger questioned ominously of Percival.

I saw Percival shrink away when William turned on a blaze of light. I saw Percival through a slit between my eyelids—Percival cower-

ing, trembling. He had known torture, I saw, and torture of an exquisite sort!

"I'm going to — tell William— now," Percival chanted.

"*Are* y-you?" Roger questioned.

I heard Percival sob.

"Janette, take Percival to his rooms," my aunt ordered. She must have been near the door.

"No—*no!*" Percival screamed.

I could imagine William standing muddled and blank-faced in the midst of this wild confusion which gave little clue to truth.

"Take him to his rooms, Janette," said my aunt, almost hysterically. "Roger and I will follow— *to deal with him* later!'

"*Oh—no!*" Percival screamed again.

"Keep quiet!" Roger ordered. "D-do you w-want the *w-world* to know?"

I heard Percival being led away. I could mark his progress by his deep, gusty sobs. Then—evidently he had torn himself from Janette to come running back. Her heavier tread followed, and quickly, his frantic, lurching race.

"I don't care—what you do. William shall—know now—he shall—*know!*" he sang out. Then—never have I heard so much of stark terror expressed in sound — gasps, muted screams, hard breathing, and the thud of a heavy body that had dropped, unconscious, to the floor. I opened my eyes. I forgot my rôle —everything—but the fact that I must see.

The closet door was opening—slowly—slowly—and when it was opened a man in a business suit stood in it, and he was the same man to whom I had told my troubles in the Waters-Sims Detective Bureau!

Janette, it was, who had fainted, I saw. Percival was gibbering in a corner. Roger was backing out of the door. William, only, was half sane. More of baffled wonder than terror was on his face, although sufficient terror was there.

I saw Roger close the door into the hall. I heard him lock it from the outside! The man was moving toward William—or my aunt?

I DROPPED my eyelids. I was sleeping. I judged I was supposed to sleep through anything. "Y-you know what you g-gave her," came back to me in Roger's stammer. Morphine, or something of that sort, I supposed.

"William — do you — know of this?" my aunt asked on a rasping, wheezy out-breath.

"No," I heard from William.

"One of you — or both — know why I'm here," the invader stated grimly.

"If you're speaking of blackmail, that depraved girl on the bed and her mother have been carrying that on—and for years!" my aunt answered.

"How did you know I was speaking of blackmail?" I heard in the deep voice which somehow reminded me of the voice of the man who had said to my aunt: "Your bells is in order now, missus."

"I've known of — this," she gasped. "It has—close to killed me. I have thought of little else, and when trouble arises I naturally think it is made by this—our family shame—the thing that is eating my heart away."

"Blackmail?" William echoed stupidly.

My aunt laughed suddenly. "My son, who works in the telegraph office, pretends to know nothing of this?" she questioned scathingly of

William. "He has not been aiding his pretty cousin?"

William broke out with "Mother, what do you mean?"

She said: "You know. I've been trying to save you this night—from the consequence of your sins—but I can do it no longer! You and that child on the bed with whom—or for whom—you are working—you must, together and now, face the grave charges that are brought against you. Oh, that I brought you into being!" she ended in the most poignant wail I have ever heard.

William! I thought. William—who had seemed so dull and so good? But why, then, had he objected to his mother's and Roger's hiding the knife in my room? But time for speculation was short!

I HEARD the slam of the front door. Then a shot. And after that came the purr of a motor which seemed to be parked not too near the house, in the public way.

"What was *that?*" my aunt screamed.

Again I opened my eyes, in time to see the man in the business suit trying the door knob. And the door was locked, I knew, and it had been locked from the outside.

"Field!" he said. I heard a scuffling from beneath my bed. I saw Jim Field struggle up and rise to full height. And, her eyes fixed on him, my aunt went mad: she laughed, she screamed, she sobbed; and, screaming, she wrung and bit her hands; I saw her tear great strands of white hair from her head with those two frenzied hands; and all this time she stared—stared with big, wild eyes at the man she had called "Young Field."

"Quiet!" he ordered her sharply.

She subsided, her hands pressed against her mouth, to whimpers and to trembling. I saw Percival make his way, unsteadily and as a sleepwalker might, to Jim Field's side.

"Then they—didn't do *that*—to you," he whispered brokenly, gladly.

Janette, an ungainly heap on the floor of the East Room, opened her eyes slowly.

"Dr. Field?" she muttered weakly. "Dr.—Field?"

"None other," he assured her.

"They—didn't do — *that?*" she questioned.

"No," Jim Field answered; "and they will never do *that* to any one again!"

He turned to the bed. "Wake up, Miss Burke!" he commanded, and my aunt screamed again and piercingly as I sat up in bed.

"Break the door open, McKelvy," Doctor Field ordered. "Some one has been shot outside." he added.

"Sounded like it," agreed the man, who now pressed his great shoulder against the locked door.

"I hope your first born made the target, Mrs. Garrison," said McKelvy.

"You take a great deal for granted. You are quite certain of the culprit, aren't you?" my aunt questioned, her voice again strong.

THEN the door burst open with a crash, and outside cringed a white thing.

"Who's *this?*" McKelvy shouted.

"Theodore Cassell, late purser of the steamship *Atlantis,*" answered the man, whom I should hardly have recognized, in a weak, broken chant that was not unlike Percival's. "I have a testimony to make," he went on. "It concerns—Angelica Burke, daughter of one of the most notorious and successful blackmailers from whom the world has ever suffered." He swayed. I thought he would faint. And I thought I would!

"Give your signal," Dr. Field ordered. From the east window McKelvy whistled for help. A moment, and three men in blue pounded up the stairs, and they were followed by another man in a business suit, who was called Dwight, I learned later, and who worked for Dr. Field, as did my McKelvy of the agency.

"This somewhat changes the complexion of the matter?" my aunt asked, smiling cruelly at me.

"We shall see," Dwight answered.

One of the men touched his cap before he spoke to McKelvy.

"Bennet was winged," he said, "but not bad. We've got him strapped up and lying in the drawing-room. Roger Garrison got off. We was at the back, just then—something had made a noise there. Bennet was alone out front."

"I wouldn't brag of where you were if I were you. Your business is to be where there's trouble," McKelvy commented shortly.

The man flushed. "We went to the back of the house," he answered, "because there was noises there. We was lookin' for trouble——"

"Really?" McKelvy questioned sarcastically. Then he added: "You reported Roger Garrison's getting away?"

"The wires is cut," the man answered; "likely he done it hisself before he left."

"Spare me your idea of the details," said McKelvy. He turned to my aunt. "We will adjourn to your drawing-room now, with your permission," he said. "And if Miss Burke will get up and put on some sort of kimono and come down, too, I shall be grateful."

I said I would.

"She'll get away, too, if you leave her a second," warned my erstwhile admirer, Theodore Cassell.

"No one else will escape from this house now," McKelvy answered grimly. "And, anyway, the young lady is not the one in this party who wishes to escape. Perhaps she is the only one who belongs in the house who does not wish to escape."

I watched the curious group file from my room—the East Room, which had been reported to be haunted. In the hall a policeman waited by the side of my doorway, while I got up and struggled into my warmest negligée. And then, as I stepped out, I heard the opening of the front door, the slow tread of two men, and then the slam of the door.

"THEY'RE bringing in that Roy," said my guardian in blue as I joined him. "He was done in—terrible, and that there William Garrison splattered with blood like he'd been stickin' pigs. You're with a fine crowd, miss, and it'll go hard with you, even if you're innocent."

"I am ready to go down," I stated.

"You're a cool one," he said, "but when they get the screws on, miss, that coolness of yours won't help you none!"

We went down the stairs, and as we reached the bottom I glanced down the hall to see two men carrying Roy into "the little room," and blood marked the route they had followed. I felt a little sickness, and I swayed. My tormentor, who was following me, saw my swaying, and he said: "Every business has its unpleasant sides, hasn't it, miss?"

Again I didn't answer him. We had reached the drawing-room door, which was closed. The man tapped.

"Come in!" I heard, in the booming tones of McKelvy.

The officer who had waited to escort me down the stairs opened the door, and I saw that the piano was open.

(To be concluded next month)

"Take a look, Sing Fung."

The Seventh Stripe

By JEAN GILLESPIE

Subtlety and crudeness come to a clinch—and a bundle of rags determines the decision.

"NOW I asks you, is that any way for a well-behaved one to be actin'? For shame, I says. Ah, you would, would you? To think I should 'ave lived to see this day!" The whining voice subsided into a soft sniffling.

Sing Fung, venerable dealer in wood carvings and silks, sat very straight in his high-backed chair of Chinese blackwood and gazed with drooping eyes at the man who grovcled at his feet. He was only a bundle of rags, topped with a rusty tangle of reddish hair, and he crouched on the Tien-Tsin rug above a heavy wooden box and wept maudlin tears.

"He's the best bloomin' little snake you ever laid your eyes on," he babbled. "Kitchie, the Bad One, I calls 'im. Lief strike you as look at you. Take a look, Sing Fung."

He tilted the big box with its brass corners about till Sing Fung, peering down, saw two small eyes glint coldly up at him from a scaly coil of pinkish green.

"Look at 'is six stripes, would you? Hevery one means a kill." The ragged one prodded the snake

with a stick, and a restless shudder ran over the coiled length as the man talked on.

"Used to love me like a bloomin' brother, he did. Hand raised he is, too. Jano got 'im when he weren't no bigger'n a bloomin' angle-worm. Ah, you would, would you?" as the snake struck violently at the prodding stick and the big box rocked menacingly.

"He's gone back on me." The small man beat his rusty locks against a quaint bowl of white narcissus that stood on the rug, till their bruised fragrance perfumed the air.

SING FUNG placed a pinch of tobacco on the tiny bowl of his long pipe and lighted it with a burning punk which he took from a brass censer that stood near his chair. He drew three puffs before he said: "When you passed this way before, you were a man."

"A man!" wailed the ragged one, lifting a vague face, deeply pitted with smallpox scars and looking at the old Chinaman from pale, watery eyes that trembled in a dim borderland between cunning and fatuity.

"That I was, till I goes over to that bloomin' Asia and gets caught like a fly on a sticky paper. Now what's the good of me? Only a dirty bundle of rags is what I is. Even Kitchie don't fancy me no more, and all the years I've been a-keepin' of him. Watchin' the stripes come out on him, and 'earing 'im 'issing like a bloomin' teakettle every time he gets his man.

"First stripe he ever gets was a thievin' Malay. 'E put 'is 'and in Jano's pocket, and there was Kitchie, all curled up, laying for him. Malay staggers ten steps or so and drops in his tracks. When we got 'ome, Jano takes him out of her pocket an' looks at him. 'There,' she says to me, 'got his man, he did, and his first stripe, and some day he'll get Slade.'

"She twines Kitchie round her arm. Right pretty he looks, pinkish against her brown skin. Still as a mouse he'd stay till Jano'd ruffle up his back and hiss 'Slade' at him. Then the whole length of him would quiver and shake like a leaf in the wind."

SING FUNG stirred at the mention of Slade's name. He knocked the ashes from his pipe and refilled it, but before he put the amber mouthpiece to his lips he asked: "Was Slade your enemy?"

"My enemy?" The ragged one cackled weakly. "Enemy to every man but himself was Slade. I used to take a 'and training Kitchie against him, too. 'Slade,' I'd say to 'im. 'You'll know him by the bloated ugly mug of him. You'll know him by the big, hairy fists that have pounded poor devils to jelly. You'll know 'im if you looks deep into his little rotten eyes and see what I seen there, all the gone-to-'ell souls he's murdered. Slade,' says I to Kitchie, and he purrs as soft as a kitten and promises Jano and me that some day he'll wear another stripe for Slade. 'Cause if there's one thing Slade is scared of, it's a snake. Can't run, can't yell, if he sees one. Just turns a sickish green and freezes."

The red head went down again on the bruised flowers.

"Now Kitchie don't love me no more. Jano's gone. Died like a sick cow last spring, and I comes all the way over to 'Frisco, follering Slade, and now a feller on the boat says as Slade is croaked. 'Ad his bloomin' throat cut down on the dock one dark night. Poor Jano, to think she missed it!"

The tears flowed again, as if a tap had been turned.

"Maybe I'd forgot if it hadn't been for Jano. She never forgot 'im. Good cause she had to remember, she 'ad. Half dead she were when he left her, and half dead were I. Poor Jano weren't such a bad sort for a black. I don't rightly remember what he did to her more'n cut off her hand. Lor'! you'd be fair startled to see how she learned to do with the one hand."

Still the babble went on, rambling, maudlin. Still the old Chinaman sat in his high-back, carved chair, his dim eyes faintly flickering under the drooping parchment of their yellow lids.

"And I doin' his devil's work for him for years, being too scared to cut and run. There was that girl I stole for him up Burma way. Then the Chink I robbed over on the Chiny coast. Slade always did have a pick against Chinks. Some said it come from being married to a Chiny woman.

"I wasn't a man to ever kill or even fight. Peaceful cove, I've always been. Think of me hitched with a killin' bloke like Slade! Couldn't fight him, couldn't run away! Just stayed till he liked to killed me and threw me out! Half dead I was, and he thought I was done for, but Lor'! he'd half killed me so many times that I 'ad got as many lives as a bloomin' pussy-cat."

THE ragged one got up and sat on the mother-of-pearl inlaid stool of ebony that Sing Fung pushed forward. Unsteadily he lifted the small bowl of *ng ka py* and gulped the fiery liquor. He sputtered a bit, then turned to the Chinaman.

"Could I leave Kitchie 'ere overnight? He's no use to me now, and there's a professor chap at the college across the bay that buys poisonous snakes, but I can't get over till to-morrow. I can't leave him aboard the stinkin' old ship, 'cause some of those rats would steal him and sell him for themselves. Got a cellar or some place to stow him away?"

Sing Fung rose.

"There is an underground, cell-like passage beneath my humble home," he said politely, "and if my friend thinks it a fitting abode for his honorable snake, I shall be only too glad to place him there with my own unworthy hands."

The ragged one grinned.

"Never forget a favor, Sing Fung. Knowed me again after all these years the minute you clapped eyes on me."

The old Chinaman raised his head, the saffron lids all but hiding the dull glow of his old eyes, a hidden glow like that of the last faint embers of a fading fire beneath a gray ash.

"You saved my son's life," he said simply. "And my son is very dear to me."

The ragged one fumbled at the box.

"Here's a little hook what holds down the lid," he said. "Don't lift it, 'cause if he ever got out you'd have a sweet time catchin' him. I'll be here first thing in the morning."

WHEN the door had closed after the little man, Sing Fung lifted the heavy box and staggered back with it through the shop. From a small drawer in a cabinet of Ningpo wood he took a long, notched key. Then he lighted a thin end of wax taper, and, by its flickering light, descended a short flight of rickety stairs. At the bottom of the stairs was a passageway—musty, dark, still. At the farther end of the passageway, a heavy door blocked the

way. This door Sing Fung unlocked and entered. He held the flickering taper high, peering through the darkness till his eyes found a shelf. On this he placed the box containing the exalted snake of his old friend, and, after locking the door again, padded back up the steps.

IT WAS the third hour after rice, and he found his son, Sing Lee, in the shop. The old man took a sheaf of papers and his counting abacus and sat down again in his carved chair. As he worked on his accounts, his eyes were troubled.

Sing Lee was a good son, but the eyes of good sons have been known to stray. And Lee's eyes had strayed far. Little had old Sing Fung ever thought when the pretty half-caste Anna had been a toddling infant playing with Lee that a son of Sing would ever let his eyes rest upon her. In the security of his ancestral country Sing Fung felt that things would never have come to this. And yet travelers told him that in China also had much water passed under the bridge. Ah, well! The old man sighed. Times change, and what one generation writes in the book, another reads.

Lee interrupted his musings. He was a slender lad with laughing eyes, but to-night they did not hold any laughter.

"Father, can't you prove that Ming Fan and her white husband are not the parents of Anna?"

The old Chinaman laid aside his papers and reached for his pipe. He drew on it before he answered.

"No, my son. I know that they are not her parents, but I have only my word—and what is the word of an old Chinaman against the word of so powerful a white man?"

"So wicked a white man," cried Lee, "is what you should say! Father, he has promised her to Lun Chon, who gives him a great deal of money for her."

"A father has control over his children, my son," said the old man.

"But this devil is not her father, and Lun Chon is a fat old beast," the boy replied. "And I love her, and she loves me!" He flung out the words defiantly and stood waiting.

The old Chinaman looked at his son thoughtfully. He stood very straight, very young, very defiant, against the great screen that stood between the shop and the living quarters — the great screen embroidered with threads of many colors, with the emblems of the four seasons, sprays of bamboo, plum blooms, chrysanthemums, and epidendrums. The lovely screen embroidered by the tea-rose-petal hands of Lee's mother, hands that were dust save in the heart of old Sing Fung. These slender ivory hands seemed to be pleading for this headstrong child of hers. Sing Fung could see the shadow of her fragile beauty in this slim young son.

As his father did not speak, Lee flung back his head proudly, yet the words trembled as they left his lips.

"This afternoon, at the American Mission, we were married."

For a long time the old man sat silent. For as long a time as it would take to burn many prayer papers over an ancestor's grave did he sit, unmoving. Then evenly, quietly, when the stillness was frightening the boy, he spoke.

"Then, if you have married her, why do you not bring your wife home?"

"Father!" The boy was incredulous, wild with relief, with delight. "You mean I may bring her here?"

"Where else should you bring your wife?" asked his father. "This is your home. Your wife is welcome."

But when Lee went racing out of the shop, the glow in the old man's eyes was gone. Only dead ash remained. Stiffly he went to the door and looked out on the thickening fog, smoking the pipe of his fathers, and meditating.

THEN through the blanketing curtain of mist came footsteps, hurrying, stumbling, panic-stricken —footsteps echoing with the terror of youth and the blind fright of children.

It was Sing Lee and Anna who came stumbling into the tiny shop, breathless, half sobbing, shuddering. Without a word the old man followed them in and closed the door. His son's face was cut, bleeding. The girl's narrow shoulders shook, and her eyes were full of dumb terror, like those of a whipped animal.

"That man"—Sing Lee's voice was a gasp—"he beat her. See!"

He pulled back the girl's collar. Her shoulders were striped with welts.

"He tied her."

The girl's outstretched wrists bore mute evidence of Lee's assertion.

The boy went on, anger shaking him: "To-night he was to give her to Lun Chon, though he knew she was my wife. She is a good girl, father. She loves me. She will make me a good wife. Look in her eyes and see."

The old man looked into the girl's grave dark eyes. Unflinchingly they met his own, clear, true, and good. Old Sing Fung sighed heavily, but he laid his knotted yellow claw on the girl's sleek, black head gently.

"When I went for her, he struck me," Sing Lee told him. "See my cheek. It bleeds from the blow."

The eyes of his father blazed up under the veil of his heavy lids like ember under a gray ash. The face of his son defiled by scum of the streets!

"I climbed into her room from the fire-escape," continued Sing Lee. "I untied her and helped her down. He does not know yet that she is gone."

Sing Fung was as impassive as some saffron-tinted joss. His voice held the faint after-vibrance of an old brass gong.

"My children, this is your home. Go."

He motioned them toward the stairs that led upward from behind the great screen. Trustingly secure in his serenity, they turned away, hand in hand. But at the foot of the stairs, the boy turned.

"If that man comes here?"

Little sparks kindled a small flame in Sing Fung's old eyes, but his voice was steady: "I will settle with him."

SING FUNG waited till all was quiet above before he went back to his pipe and his meditations in the doorway. The fog thickened with the night. Passers-by were fewer. A clock on a church spire near by boomed the hours—midnight, one, two, three.

Sing Fung was alone in a world of wet, gray fog. He was damp, cold, even through the heavy padding of his black silk robe. He sighed and nodded wearily. He was contemplating a rheumatic to-morrow. Nature is unkind to old men who linger in the damp night air. Young folk are prone to large fears. Sing Fung sighed again and had turned to go into the shop when the sound of footsteps held him still. They were erratic footsteps that dodged along as if their maker were slipping stealthily from one sheltering doorway to another.

Sing Fung stepped back into the doorway, his dark robe blending with the shadows. So it was that the burly figure, creeping along through the fog, failed to see the old Chinaman till Sing Fung spoke. The stranger leaped back with the startled alertness of a huge cat.

"You filthy heathen!" he snarled. "I got a score to settle with you. Get in and close the door quick."

Inside the darkened room, Sing Fung snapped on a small night-light that swung above the counter. It burned dimly, casting wavering caricatures of the two men on the ceiling—the shriveled old Chinese and the paunchy, bloated man with his evil little eyes.

"Now, listen, you old Chink." The man thrust forward his reddened, seamed jaw. "You and your kid got my girl. I come to git her back and a blamed sight more, 'fore I'm through with you."

Sing Fung was silent. The stranger lifted a knotted fist suddenly and struck him full in the mouth. The old man went down like a felled tree, but he scrambled to his feet with amazing agility. The pipe of his fathers lay in broken fragments at his feet. He stooped and gathered the bits of porcelain. Impatiently the big man caught him by the throat and shook him, then threw him backward against the wall.

"That'll learn you!" He waggled his huge head. "That'll learn you to speak up when I asks you something! You got my girl?"

Sing Fung looked down at the fragments of his broken pipe cradled in his yellow hand, and the twin flames in his old eyes flared up and burned like little dancing devils. He raised his lids slowly, and his eyes were ash again.

"My son, he brings your girl home. My son is an honorable gentleman. He married your girl. He will treat her well. She will have a good home here."

"Married her? The blasted Chink! And I thought they were lying. And I was to get five thousand from Lun Chon for her. And now married to this kid! I could—I——"

HE SPUTTERED into incoherence at the thought of his lost five thousand. The twisted veins of his thick neck purpled. He strode about the shop. He made insane lunges at the articles on the counter. He seized a Satow bowl, thin as an eggshell, and crushed it in his big, hairy fist. He kicked over a stand of Ming jars. He tore at the screen, the great embroidered screen. Destruction marking his trail as it does that of a tornado, he turned again on Sing Fung. His thick voice was choked, constricted, as if he felt the tightening of a shadowy noose around his neck. He lunged at the old man as he talked, but in his wildness he missed him.

"Now, you—you——" His lurid vocabulary failed him. "You can fork over that money for me. You can pay for my girl. Haven't I raised her good all these years? And then she goes and marries a Chink—and if there's anything I hate it's a lousy Chink! You'll pay for her, old man, or I'll take it out of your hide!"

"I have some money. You take that?" The old parchment face was drawn and gray. That money meant a great deal to Sing Fung. A start for Sing Lee. The home land, perhaps, for Sing Fung.

"You bet your life I'll take it. Hurry up, now!" The big man opened and shut his corded hand

as if he already felt the sweet weight of the money.

Sing Fung opened the wall safe, clawlike fingers fumbling at the contents. There was a roll of bills, a canvas sack of jingling coins, and a thin, gray bank-book.

The stranger snatched at the collection with avid hands. Gloatingly, he ruffled the bills, then tossed them aside contemptuously. He merely glanced at the silver in the sack and tossed it beside the bills. Then he opened the bankbook.

"Three thousand dollars! Where's the rest? Got it hid here, I guess. Oh, you Chinks are pretty cagy, but you can't fool me! Trot it out. Make it snappy, blast you!"

Sing Fung stood stolid, unmoved. "There is no more."

"What you doin'? Lookin' for trouble? Tell me that an old Chink like you never had no more than three thousand dollars? Fat chance you got to get away with it! I bet you got all of ten grand cached around this joint some place."

"There is no more." The voice of Sing Fung was still faintly vibrant, like the clang of an old brass gong.

"Now, see here, old man." The other's face was an unhealthy crimson, verging on blue. "There's more money 'round here some place. Say, it wasn't later'n last week an old Chink over on Clay Street tried to hold out on me, but after I——" He drew a suggestive finger across the wattled throat of Sing Fung. "I searched the place, and down in the cellar I found a roll that would choke a horse."

Sing Fung slipped yellow hands that trembled slightly into his silken sleeves. "There is no more," he said.

THE white man drew up a chair to a small table and seated himself. With a great show of deliberation, he took out a thin watch crusted with diamonds and laid it on the table-top. His rage had seemingly exhausted itself. His wicked little eyes twinkled coldly, as at some preposterous joke.

He tapped the crystal of the watch.

"Look here, you, it's twenty after four. When the clock says four-thirty, I'll either know where that money is or you'll be learning a lot of things a live man doesn't know nothin' about." He smiled.

Sing Fung stood, his arms hidden in his voluminous sleeves, his yellow face as inexpressive as a piece of yellow parchment. The night light shed a watery, unreal radiance over the small shop. There was no sound from the sleeping street; no sound in the shop save the tiny tick-tick of the time-piece and the loud, hoarse breathing of the white man.

At five minutes before the half-hour, the stranger repeated: "Ready to tell yet?"

Sing Fung shook his head.

"There is no more," he answered quietly.

"Is that so?" The other laughed raucously and turned away. Then, as though something had just occurred to him: "I forgot to tell you a while back that when I slit that Chink's throat, his kid came running in and began to raise a rumpus. Tong war, the papers called it next morning.

"Your boy and my girl up-stairs, eh? Well, let's hope that when they hear us having a little trouble they won't try to mix."

Sing Fung stirred slightly. He looked at the great silken screen that shut off the stairs. The screen, torn now, embroidered by the rose-petal hands of Lee's mother when her son was a round-eyed babe. Lee, up-stairs, with his chance for life

and happiness. Lee with his eager young courage. Fire smoldered and burnt under the heavy saffron lids. Sing Fung did not speak.

Steady he stood till the minute-hand of the watch marked the half-hour. Then, in answer to the big man's repeated question, he spoke, and his voice was harsh, as the clang of an old brass gong might be if it were hit too hard by a rough hand and broken.

"Yes, there is more. But it may not bring happiness. I ask again. You take all this." He gathered the bank-book, the bills, the coin sack, and held them toward the white man. "Take all this and go."

The white man laughed silently, grimacingly.

"Hell, no, now when you've come clean! What do you think I am, crazy?"

Sing Fung bent a submissive head and went back through the shop. From a tiny drawer in an inlaid cabinet he took a key. He lighted the thin taper, and by its flickering light descended a short flight of rickety stairs.

The big man, close at his heels, his voice dropped to an eager whisper, asked: "How much is there, old man? Remember, no holding out on me. Every cent or——"

He reached forward and for an instant his big, hairy hand closed and tightened on Sing Fung's scrawny neck.

The Chinaman choked a bit, then when he was free answered: "There will be enough. You will ask no more."

He could hear the anticipatory smack of the other man's loose lips as he unlocked the door of the musty passage. Inside the room, Sing Fung held the end of the taper high. It fell on the stranger's upturned, bloated face, it danced in his little pig-like eyes, it picked out a recent scar that ran its jagged length from ear to ear across his thick throat. It lit up a box on the shelf—a strong-looking box with a hook at the side.

SING FUNG put up a steady finger to the hook, but the other, his evil eyes in the candlelight two glinting points of burning greed, pushed the old man back.

"Here, you, never mind. I'll open it myself."

He snatched the candle from the old man's hand, almost extinguishing it in his haste. He opened the door into the passageway and gave the old man a shove that sent him reeling out into the dark.

"Get out and stay out," he muttered. "Don't try any funny tricks on Bill Slade, neither." He drew the door, the good, stout door, shut behind him.

Sing Fung pulled himself to his feet and groped in the darkness. An iron bar hung by the door. Sing Fung slid it softly into place. Then he noiselessly turned the key in the keyhole. He bent his head and listened. Silence, that was all. Yet before he turned away he thought he had heard a prolonged hissing, such as steam makes when it bubbles out of a boiling teakettle.

He seized the satchel and disappeared beyond a mesquit clump

Clean Linen

By PRESLEY E. BRYANT

A Midwestern chief of detectives says that all crooks are fools—that any dumb but patient cop can outwit the smartest criminal. He makes out a plausible case, too—in this story. But if this were so, there wouldn't be so many prize rascals going scot free. We'd like to know how our readers feel about this.

I

I REMEMBER that when I was a cub reporter, occasionally assigned to the police station and continually assailed by romantic notions, I once referred to old Guy Steele in print as a Midwestern Lecoq.

"The chief wants to see you—bad," Pete Riley told me, as I stopped at The Desk.

I apologized to the chief of detectives—apologized as all cub reporters do at the first signs of literary backfire. But I now retract. After some years of retrospect, old Guy stands out. He had much in common with Lecoq. He understood human nature, had no ego, and was a voracious feeder upon detail.

"I don't like that, boy," he said to me. "I know you were trying to be complimentary, but I make my living at this business, and it goes hard to be classed as a character in fic-

tion, even if it was written by Gaboriau himself. Listen, now. For your own sake, I am willing to tell you the insides of how my crooks get themselves into prison, but do not put it into your newspaper. I have some little reputation—because they do not understand how I do it. Part of the mystery is my common, ordinary old manner and looks. Any smart crook can glance at me and get my number. They've all got me tagged, praise be, as a boob. When I pick up something they let slip, it's not brains, it's bad luck. Most of the time it's just that, too. It is remarkable how the game breaks against the crooks. Any dumb but patient cop can outwit the smartest criminal. The dumber they think he is, the better.

"I tell you, lad, I never solved a mystery in my life. The crooks solve them for me. Sometimes they frame up elaborate jobs in such a way that their own schemes are sign-posts that any one can read."

That was a long lecture. Old Guy Steele had nothing to do that afternoon. He soon convinced me that the crooks were right. A garrulous old man, blundering onto the right answers—but honest enough not to claim credit undue.

I RETAINED this idea for several years. Then I was graduated to the copy desk and began to get perspective. By a fluke, I got to handle the Lawrence Degon story, was thrown back into contact with Steele, and was taken behind the scenes.

This case turned upon a trifle—a perfectly obvious incongruity that nobody noticed except the old detective chief. He'd been out of town. He returned dramatically just in time to prevent a clean get-away.

Degon was a young man of good family, appearance, and reputation. Insofar as I can remember, there was not a single smudge upon his character. He was never known to drink, to smoke, to gamble, or to meddle with women. He was negative, of course. The only complaint his employers, the Second National Bank, had of him was that he lacked ambition. That was not a serious shortcoming. Messengers of good habits would better lack ambition. He had no debts; on the contrary, nearly twelve hundred dollars saved. He made his home with and contributed to the support of his mother and two sisters. No sweetheart. Few friends. No hobbies.

Lawrence Degon at twenty-five was not liked, but he was respected. When he reported that he had been robbed in broad daylight of forty-thousand dollars after a hold-up in the midst of a crowd of pedestrians, his story was believed. It was, in some respects, a weird recital, but somehow he invested it with commonplace atmosphere. His own drab nature was a paint tube of protective coloring. The officers of his bank expressed confidence in him, and the police agreed right after the robbery not even to detain him.

I was compelled, by a shortage in our staff, to interview J. D. Huntress, president of the Second National. It was clear that he reluctantly admired the boy. "He keeps his head," he said, once.

That story broke just before our city edition went to press. We had a rough time, pulling in telephone reports from widely separated points and shooting copy to the composing room in five-line takes, to beat our afternoon competitor. The story looked good then, for we had it on the street ten minutes before *The News* made it.

An unmasked bandit, pressing a pistol into his side, marched Lawrence

Degon, Second National Bank messenger, ten blocks through crowded sidewalks to a wagon yard on the Telephone road, robbed him of a satchel containing nearly forty thousands dollars, and left him bound and gagged in a thicket. . . .

As I understand it, the money, mostly in currency, was to settle a balance against the Second National in the clearing house. The satchel in which it was contained was leather, lined with steel and fitted with a stout lock. A chain, integral with the lock, fastened the satchel to a handcuff locked about the messenger's wrist. The bandit was compelled to saw this chain, a laborious job.

Degon left his bank at about two o'clock. Shortly after three o'clock, he succeeded in spitting out a handkerchief which his captor had jammed into his mouth and called for help. He was hazy as to how long it had been since the bandit left him, but I figured that it had taken them fifteen minutes to walk to the wagon yard. It must have required half an hour to truss up the boy and saw him loose from his satchel.

OLD Guy Steele returned to his office at four. I stressed to him my thought that the thief had but a little more than an hour's start.

"I'm much obliged to you, Mr. Lecoq," the chief snorted, pawing over the odds and ends that had been picked up in and near the thicket in the wagon yard by his assistants, indefatigable souvenir hunters. He then summoned one of these men, by means of a push button he operated with his knee, and talked to him rapidly in whispers which I could not understand, although I was just a desk-length away. His iron-gray mustache tantalized me, as it danced to the vehemence of his talk. Had I but known the code in which it wigwagged, I felt sure that I should have intercepted exciting news. He divined my curiosity as he whispered, and dropped me a malicious wink.

Presently the detective said: "All right, chief," and hurried out, and then Steele pulled his telephone into his lap and held another cryptic conversation. A car roared out of the police garage on the ground floor just below the chief's office, and then another. He relaxed and lit a cigar. But after a couple of puffs he got up.

"I'm leaving you for a while," he said. "Stick around and I'll give you something to put in your paper."

What follows was not all in the extra edition we had the boys yelling before the downtown offices sprang their evening leaks and flooded the streets with homegoers. We didn't wait for background. We tied knots in *The News's* tail that afternoon. Again we beat them by a crushing margin and on the same story! Such things make local newspaper history.

II

LAWRENCE DEGON'S day ended at 5:30. He lived with his mother, on the South Loop, and ordinarily he walked the five miles home. In spite of his youth, he was remarkably consistent, almost hidebound, in his habits. Harry Dill, having become interested in him, put him on a schedule. He calculated that at 5:45 Degon would cut through the Twelfth Street plaza, and there he encountered the youth whenever he cared to do so.

Dill, at the moment, was not a busy man, but he was a methodical man always. Method was his art and his bulwark. He was confident that he would never open his mouth and put his foot in it, because he

considered everything he did. He planned to the minutest, recognizing that details are vital, but he set out so many seedlings that finally he couldn't see the forest for the trees —which is characteristic.

Their first meeting seemed the merest accident. Lawrence had turned into the diagonal walk. Near the centre of the square, where all paths converged, Lawrence saw a tall man turn his ankle and hop on one foot to a nearby bench. It was Harry Dill.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" Lawrence asked.

"No, thanks. I'll be all right in a minute. Got a bullet in my foot in the Philippines, and my ankle never has been any good since. Sometimes I twist it so I can't get about for days."

Lawrence was impressed that the man was old, but probably he was thirty-five. His skin was leathery and creased and folded. He was lean, and he had a startlingly direct and steady glance. His appearance fitted into the story he told presently. He had been in old Mexico, mining, and was waiting for his partner to come out. Then they would go east together. There was a chance of interesting some big capital. He was enticingly vague. Lawrence fitted into the story rather favorably to Dill. They chatted. It was tiresome being stalled in a strange town, even though it was good to be back in civilization. Didn't know a soul. If Lawrence, he suggested, would help him to his room, in a nearby hotel, he would tape his ankle and enjoy having his benefactor as a guest for dinner.

Degon demurred. His mother——

"I see," Dill said. "You're right there. It wouldn't do to disappoint your mother. Some other time. To-morrow. It really will be a favor to me."

The youth helped Dill to his room and left him there. But next evening he had dinner with the man. For almost three months they drifted about, forming a sort of intimacy, the elder always holding the leadership and the advantage, as in such relationships is so often the case.

If not a philosopher, Dill was a philosophical lecturer of no mean ability. They fell into the attitude of peripatetic and pupil. Presently Dill had a cross-section of his companion's mind as intelligible to him as a field map to a general.

"DO YOU know," he said one night, as they strolled along the river, "that almost as much money is stolen as is earned?" He did not pause for a reply, but pursued his thought. Aside from the obvious fact that many men of large income produced nothing, there was too big a spread between the bank clearances of any given community and its actual wealth. Anybody could see that. Some of this spread was legitimate, because the value of any commodity might be enhanced by its handling, its movement toward the ultimate consumer; but certainly some of it was illegitimate. Lawful, perhaps. As a matter of fact, the word "theft" had an enormous elasticity. Stealing should not be considered a crime, Dill said, unless it constituted an actual economic loss.

Dill's argument had a soporific effect upon Lawrence Degon. Without actually surrendering interest in what the older man was saying, he found himself carried along like a cork in a current, and he was not surprised when he landed in strange waters.

"I was amused," Dill said, "to

learn in a letter from a friend of mine in Montreal that a bank messenger there had just stolen a hundred thousand dollars. Everybody knew that he had stolen this money, but it could not be proved that he had actually done so, and, as nobody lost a penny, finally the effort to get such proof was dropped."

Lawrence interrupted.

"I don't understand, Harry," he said, experiencing the thrill he never failed to feel at thus familiarly addressing the older man, "how you can say nobody lost. If the fellow who took it gained it, somebody had to lose it. Surely you don't mean——"

"Oh, I mean just that — and more," Dill retorted. "How can the bank lose in a case of theft? Either the bank is protected by theft insurance, or by the surety bond under which a responsible employee works. When the theft occurs, the bank collects from the underwriter. But the insurance company does not lose, either. It's a scientific fact that nobody loses. The bank has to pay premiums, whether it is robbed or not. These premiums are a legitimate and accustomed expense of doing business, and profits are so ordered that this expense will be absorbed just like rent and other items. The insurance company, then, figures its premiums on such a basis that all possible risks will be covered and enough left over to pay handsome dividends to its stockholders. True, they try to run down the thief, but it is only a perfunctory gesture, and anybody can see that no man with brains has ever been caught."

Who can say whether Lawrence Degon had scruples, which Dill lulled to sleep, or whether he was a potential criminal, waiting to be instructed?

"He'd have gone crooked," Guy Steele told me. "He's too stupid to be honest. My boy, all crooks are fools, including the smart ones—particularly the smart ones! But what gets me is how Harry Dill knew he was ripe fruit. It must be an instinct with these old 'con' men. I never knew one who really had any brains."

DILL was a confidence man. He had been arrested several times, investigation disclosed, but never convicted. Almost without exception, the confidence worker is principally a tempter; his victim is the active or dynamic crook, swept into ruin by his own greed.

Dill began erecting a hypothetical crime in the imagination of the young bank employee, gauging the shallows of that imagination, proceeding slowly, allowing each phase to sink in deeply and inextricably.

At last, Lawrence reconstructed the plan for himself. He blossomed out with specific instructions, demands, and safeguards. He became the apparent leader of the enterprise. For days he went about armed to the teeth with the theory and the paraphernalia of their intended crime.

One day the boy appeared with his satchel on the steps of the bank, carrying his hat in his right hand. He descended, swung his hat smartly to his head, and hurried on. It was a signal, signifying that the satchel contained enough cash to justify action.

Degon's satchel was a strong box from which he could not be separated until he returned, his mission fulfilled. Lined with plates of steel, it was secured by an unpickable lock. Degon's cashier was to meet him and unlock the satchel, after going to their common destination by another route, but the handcuff

and chain attached to the bag were not to be removed until he was back in his own bank. The method was devised by the cashier; he believed that no more could be done to protect against hijacking and embezzling.

Lawrence, as instructed, dropped his hand into his coat pocket, where his pistol reposed, and swung into the sidewalk. He had not walked a block, he said, when perspiration ran into his eyes, and for a moment his pistol hand was occupied with his handkerchief. In that moment, he said, he felt a hard object press into his ribs. Beside him then strode a heavy, well-dressed man, who spoke to him in a low voice.

"Don't make a sound. Keep on moving. Don't try to make a sign to anybody," the voice, cold as the muzzle of his pistol, directed and warned, as they marched toward the wagon yard.

As they moved through the crowd, Degon noticed and was noticed by an acquaintance. This man testified that he saw Degon with some one beside him. He could not identify Degon's companion positively; but it seemed to him that Degon's description of a thick-set highwayman was exactly right. He confronted the slender Dill face to face and failed to recognize him as the man he had seen that day.

"One confession is worth twenty witnesses," old Guy Steele remarked. "I never knew two witnesses to agree on anything unless they read it in the paper, or were crooked and fixed."

Degon said he saw nobody else he recognized. He saw no one as they entered the wagon yard. Almost before he realized what was happening, he said, he found himself securely bound, hand and foot. The highwayman stuffed a handkerchief into his mouth, shoved it in hard and fastened it with another handkerchief, tied under Degon's head and across his jaws. He used a block of wood as a work bench, attacking the handcuff chain with a hack saw. Half-swooning in the heat and as a result of his straining against his bonds, Degon watched his captor cut through the chain, seize the satchel, and disappear beyond a mesquit clump.

The bank messenger struggled with his gag for some time and finally worked loose the retaining handkerchief. His jaws were stiff and sore, but presently he succeeded in spitting out the gag itself, and then he yelled.

Tom Wade, a city weigher, heard him and untied him and notified the police.

III

I WAITED nearly half an hour for the chief detective to come back to his office.

"I have a story for you," he said, when he bustled in. "We have recovered the Second National's money, and we have Degon and his confederate under arrest. I've been as busy as a chicken with its head cut off! Degon has confessed. I had a hunch that his buddy, who calls himself Harry Dill, would wait, figuring that the safest place to be was right under the gun. He was up in his room, twiddling his blessed thumbs and waiting for all the excitement to blow over. The satchel with the loot was under his bed. He had a pistol in his pocket, and it wasn't even loaded! He told me, when I got through bleeding him, that the pistol wasn't loaded because Degon insisted that it shouldn't be—but he had a handful of cartridges in his pocket. He was going to double-cross the kid, but when the

kid wasn't pinched he decided that he'd wait. No use exciting suspicion by running off. Besides, opening the bag was a difficult job, and carrying it around was precarious. He knew the roads and the trains would get the double O right off. So he laid off. That was luck, my boy."

I looked no gift horses in the mouth when there was a chance of plastering a scoop on *The News*. I asked Steele leading questions, and then I was off to clean up the story in an extra which probably is still a sore subject in the offices of our competitor. Afterward doubts arose.

"LOOK here," I demanded of Steele, late that day. "It seems to me that this boy Degon confessed without a struggle. You had nothing on him, except suspicion. His own boss vouched for him. All he had to do was to keep a stiff upper lip, and your job was cut out for you. You might or might not have been able to hook up Harry Dill. What did you do to this boy to make him crumple?"

"If you're thinking of rough stuff, nothing," Steele replied. "It's like I've told you before—the crook always gives himself away. This boy was tied up so he couldn't budge—there isn't any doubt about that. I noticed he had dirt ground into his face where he had rubbed his jaw on the ground trying to loosen his gag. Probably others noticed that, too. There wasn't any fake about that end of the job. But you'd be surprised——"

Steele began to laugh.

"I never get over my amazement at the powers of observation you newspaper reporters show on police cases," he said. "As I understand it, you were introduced to every fact that my office left for me, when I got back to town. The handkerchiefs that were used to gag that boy gave the whole show away. When I called his attention to them, he just blinked and then told me everything. When he described his buddy and the way that bird talked, I figured he was a cagey guy, hiding in his own cage. That was a pure guess. But it worked."

"There wasn't a mark on those handkerchiefs, chief," I protested, when I was able to get in a word edgewise. "I particularly looked them over."

"Oh, you did!" he said.

"Yes, I did."

"And that's why I laughed," he replied. "Those handkerchiefs had never been used. They had never been washed. We even picked up one of the oiled-paper wrappers they came in. I know the store that sold them, and have a man who will testify he sold them to Harry Dill. Lawrence Degon couldn't stand the thought of being gagged with a dirty rag, although he appreciated the necessity of being gagged. I said to him: 'You don't expect me to believe this hi-jacker was worried about your dear little mouth, do you?' and he just said 'My God!' and then told me everything."

The Parson and the Clerk

By ROBERT W. SNEDDON

THERE is a legend for nearly every rock that sticks out of the soil of Devonshire, Sir Francis Drake's home county. Near Dawlish on the coast is a rocky projection which suggests a parson in his pulpit with his clerk below.

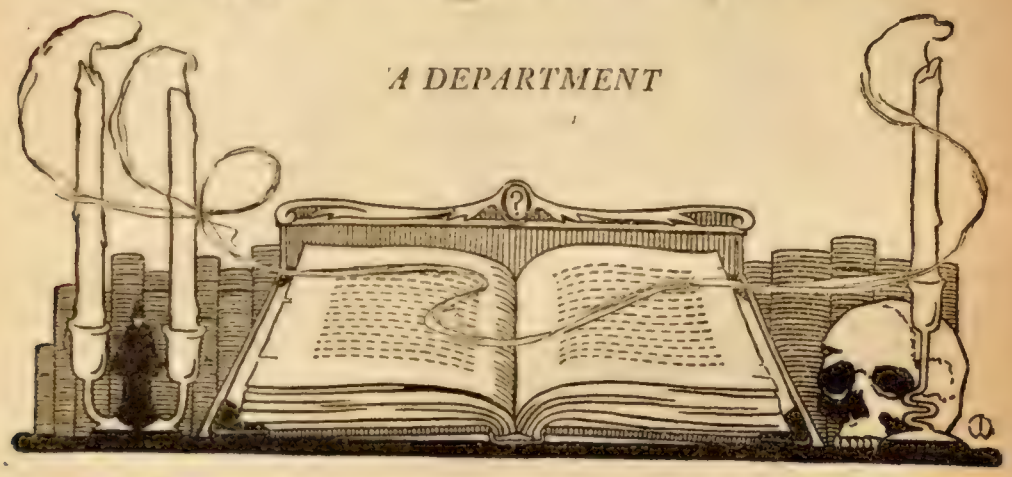
It seems that once upon a time there was a Bishop of Exeter who lay very ill at Dawlish, and that among those who visited him frequently was the parson of an inland parish who secretly hoped that when the good bishop passed on to a better world he would be chosen to carry on the good work. The parson was a man of violent temper, and this was not improved by the long time the bishop took in dying, for the journey to visit him was long and irksome. One winter night the parson, who by now was sick of his self-imposed task, was riding towards Dawlish guided by his parish clerk, as usual. There was a heavy mist, and the worthy pair lost their way. Long after they should have been abed in Dawlish they were wandering on the hills. At last the parson turned on his clerk. "You're no darn good," said he in the free and easy language of the period. "I'd rather have the devil for a guide than you." The clerk kept his mouth shut, yet he was relieved when they came across a peasant mounted on a pony. When the stranger heard their story he offered to guide them.

Just outside Dawlish the guide stopped in front of a tumbledown inn and suggested a little refreshment for all, for they were wet through. The parson and his clerk agreed eagerly. They entered the inn and found it tenanted by a wild crew, who were drinking and singing lustily. The pair ate a meal in a quiet corner and then joined the revelers, the parson singing songs with the best of the company, until the coming of the dawn. Then he called for the horses. Just then the news came that the bishop was dead. The parson hastily helped the clerk to the saddle and mounted himself, but the horses would not stir a leg.

"I believe the devil is in the horses," cried the parson thickly. At that there was a peal of unearthly laughter. In a twinkling the inn had vanished, and the road on which the terrified and now sober pair stood was transformed into a seashore upon which huge breakers were rolling in. With a wild cry of terror the parson lashed at his horse, which was now up to its belly in the waves, but all in vain—a strange rigidity held it fast.

Next morn the folk of Dawlish saw two strange red rocks standing off the cliffs, and the parson and his clerk were heard of no more.

The Most Mysterious Happening of My Life



A DEPARTMENT

Each month MYSTERY STORIES will print letters of five hundred words or less, telling of the strange experiences of our readers.

These experiences need not be of the occult type, but they must have a strong element of mystery, and their truthfulness must be vouched for by the authors.

For each letter published we will send the writer five dollars.

Your story should preferably be typewritten on one side of the paper.

A Strange Premonition

By MARTHA NEVILLE

I WAS eleven years old at the time it occurred. To my knowledge, I had never heard of spiritualism, mental telepathy, or any of the various theories which to-day might influence an imaginative child. I was a healthy, normal, fun-loving girl, wildly excited over a visit with a little friend who lived in a distant State, and I had absolutely no thoughts about death.

There were two other children in the family besides my friend, Louise —rowdy, teasing boys—and it was through one of their pranks that the accident happened to me. On the grounds some distance from the house was a lake which the family used in the summer as a swimming

pool. Near it was a small cottage in lieu of a bath-house. The doors were glassed.

One hot afternoon we went swimming. I was the last to come out of the water. The boys ran ahead and, slamming the glass door, locked Louise and me outside. Unquestionably the slam cracked the glass, but the sudden impact of my fist broke it, with the result that my hand was cut open, and I was carried back to the house in a half fainting condition.

A doctor was sent for, my hand bandaged, and I was put to bed. I was given no opiate, nor was I in any great pain, so what subsequently occurred could not be attributed to delirium. I felt a trifle ill, nervous from the shock, and quite content to lie on the bed and listen to the sound of hushed voices in the living-room beyond.

Suddenly as I lay there it was as though the walls were opening, as though I were being carried from my present surroundings and dropped into my own home, into the midst of a group in my grandmother's room.

For the moment there was nothing startling about the sensation. Then I realized that my mother was kneeling beside Grandmother's bed, that a doctor stood at the foot of it, that Father was white-faced and sad, and that the little old lady lying upon that bed with her hands folded over her bosom was dead.

Then I gave a scream and rushed into the living-room, crying wildly: "Grandma is dead! Grandma is dead!"

Late that night a telegram came to me announcing the death of my grandmother, and asking that I come home at once.

Since then numerous other premonitions—or whatever they may be called—have come to me, but this was the first and by far the most distinct.

A Visit from "the Little People"

ANONYMOUS

ONE summer some friends were camping on a deserted farm on top of a mountain. Our own place is about half-way down, and I went up to join them at a camp-fire supper one evening, taking with me my two little boys, aged five and seven. We had a roaring fire and an excellent supper, for which our climb gave us an appetite, and although the meal had been planned early for the children's sake, we soon felt that we could not bear to leave the jollity and story-telling just in order to return home before dark.

Although the tents and beds were strictly apportioned to the people occupying them, there was a huge old barn on the place, and the man who owned the farm made the hay each year and stored it there. Some one suggested that we should all curl up there for the night, and the children fell on the idea so eagerly that I had to agree.

We took blankets which our hosts lent us and groped our way into the barn in pitch darkness. We found the ladder leading to the loft by the sense of touch alone, and finally I got myself and the two little boys settled for the night, they at one side of the loft and I at the other.

They had been nodding over the camp-fire before the party broke up, and of course they fell asleep at once, but I lay awake a long time. Though my burrow was deliciously comfortable, the strangeness of sleeping in a barn, and the little noises which may have been made by mice scampering about, made me wakeful.

It was not really a dark night, though after staring for hours at the leaping flames that had not been allowed to die down till doused with a bucket of water when we left the camp-fire place, it had seemed very black to my enlarged pupils. But now I could see much light in the great square of sky in the open barn door, as well as slits of light where the boards of the roof did not join closely. I could see the little humps of blanket under which my boys cuddled—and I saw something else as well, blinking my lids and feeling the curious thrill that a manifestation of this order must bring to those who are not skeptics.

Between me and the children I distinguished quite clearly a group of tiny figures—seven of them—from eight to nine inches in height. They were of a neutral color, but very distinct. All were gazing toward the children, and one was pointing directly at them—and I got the impression of a concentrated watchfulness. My first thought was: "Why, these are fairies! I must wake the boys so that they may see them, too!" But as I raised myself on one elbow to do so, the figures gradually faded away.

The next morning when I awoke, I saw to my horror that I had placed the boys' blanket on the very edge of the loft—so close that one sudden toss would have thrown them onto the barn floor, thirty or forty feet below.

Then I realized why the blessed little people had been there, and why they had so intently watched my babies.

The Old Hall Clock

By MRS. EUNICE CARTER

I WAS but a small child, yet quite distinctly do I remember the death of my pretty sixteen-year-old sister and the strange incident that led up to that event.

She had contracted a slight cold, and while the family physician had assured us that it was nothing serious, he nevertheless advised her to keep to her room for a day or two and rest up a bit.

It was on the second day of her illness that Mother and I—alone in the lower part of the spacious, gray-stone house which was my home—were startled by a queer, muffled sound that came from the regions of the hall. Then, to our amazement, the old grandfather's clock, which had years ago ceased to run, began to strike in its slow, ponderous way—and it struck the hour of nine.

Our astonishment was not lessened when, on investigating, we found that the huge brass pendulum was as motionless as it had been for years and years!

Strange as the incident was, we had quite forgotten it by the time the evening meal was prepared. But all too cruelly it was to be remembered, for when I followed Mother up to my sister's room as she carried her a dainty tray of

food, we were greeted at the doorway by a faint smile on the lips of our patient, and, settling back comfortably among the cushions on her couch, she asked Mother in an indifferent voice if she had heard the old clock strike.

When Mother assured her that she had, sister continued:

"I don't wish to alarm you, Mother dear, but that was a warning for me—and it means that in nine days I must die!"

That was all. My mother, a practical woman, scoffed at her words, but she remained firm in her belief. She seemed to know!

From that day on, for apparently no reason at all, Sister grew steadily worse, and on the ninth day—true to her prophecy—her spirit passed out into the Great Beyond.

Certainly she had been warned of her death, for other than that we can think of no cause or reason why she should have known that she would die—just the fact remains that she did know. And so—the mystery remains even as the old clock has remained silent since striking those nine fatal chimes.

The Dying Boy's Spirit

By MRS. WILLIAM BECKETT

THE Tripp family moved into the house next door to me. Mrs. Tripp was not particularly congenial, but she had a small son, eleven or twelve, of whom I grew very fond. He was a frail, sweet, lovable little fellow, with the most uncanny imaginative thoughts. His oldest sister died the very week they moved into the house, and he would talk to me by the hour about his sister's spirit, and how she would come to him and talk to him. He had another sister, a light-headed little thing, who laughed at him when he tried to tell her his strange ideas. He knew how it grieved his mother to talk about the dead girl, so he turned to me.

Then the boy fell ill. From the first the doctors said there was no hope for him. Abscess of the brain. The Tripp's did not have a phone, so they gave my number to the hospital. The boy lost consciousness. The hospital authorities assured the mother they would call her if the slightest change occurred. They said that the boy would live for a week or more. They also told her he might go very quickly.

My husband went away for a few days, and I had the Tripp girl come over and sleep. We slept in the same room, beds in opposite corners, facing. We went to bed with no uneasiness or fear of the boy dying that particular night. There was an arclight near, and the room was always quite light. I was awakened by whispering. I sat up quickly. The boy was leaning over his sister, whispering to her. I knew instantly that he was dying. I ran out of the room, noticing that he still stood over her, whispering. I was awake, for my mind registered that it was exactly three minutes after three by the clock in the hall. I ran as fast as I could for the phone. Just as I got there it rang.

When I took down the receiver the nurse said: "Were you waiting up all night? He died exactly at three, very suddenly. Sorry we did not have time to get you here."

The Mystery Club

A DEPARTMENT

If you've ever had a desire to write mystery stories—and there are few of us who haven't—this is the department for you.
Each month Everard Jason, the Mystery Man, presents the synopsis of an original mystery story—but he doesn't give the solution of the mystery involved. That is left to you.
Here's a chance to try out your ingenuity and your plot-making ability. And if you send in one of the three answers that in the opinion of the editors are the best, you'll get as a prize one of the splendid new mystery books listed at the end of this department.

EVERARD JASON came into our office like an ocean breeze in August. But as it was mid-winter, the Man of Mystery wore a handsome fur coat, which he put upon a chair after depositing his hat and stick and gloves on our desk.

"Here," said he, "is a new Problem, my friend—the kind of thing that tries men's souls and so forth."

"But," we expostulated, "why try men's souls? We want to entertain them, to thrill and amuse our readers——"

"Overlook my erudition," he snapped. "I was quoting something."

"What?" we asked. And when we saw that he could not recall his own quotation and that his temper was rising, we hastened to divert him. "What is the Problem?" we asked.

"Simply this," he said. "How would you go about describing the colors red or green to a person blind from birth?"

We didn't bother to ponder it.

"That's no Mystery Problem," we declared.

"If you can't solve it, it's a mystery," he said.

"If nobody can possibly solve it with exactitude, it is not a mystery," said we. "It's a—a——"

"Never mind," Jason interrupted. "We'll save it. One of these days

our Mystery Club, thanks to the efforts of your magazine, will have grown to such size it will have an upper rank of members — called Masters of Mystery. We'll save it for them to work on."

"Have you no other Problem to present to the Club in our next issue?" we asked.

"Certainly I have. Do I ever fail the Club?" he exclaimed. And then, without consulting his notebook or any document whatever, he recited the following:

PROBLEM NUMBER FIVE

THE MYSTERY OF THE GANGSTER'S ESCAPE

Certain parts of the great State of Illinois have been afflicted with gang wars of a bold and sanguinary character. Let us say that Bendig is a leader of one of the warring gangs. He is driving along a road in a powerful touring car. It is about nine in the morning.

He and the two men with him are armed with revolvers and rifles. But this is Bendig's show car, and no machine gun is mounted upon it.

The car approaches a lonely stretch of road. Just beyond this point it forks, and he must decide which of the two roads he shall travel over. One is being repaired and offers a poor prospect. Bendig is in haste and likes to go ahead at full speed. He will not turn back. But the other road, which is smooth and not being repaired, lies in "enemy" country.

Bendig is now hailed by a farmer who is driving a light truck and picking his way among the sand and gravel piles that dot the road where the repair work is being done. This farmer knows Bendig and is eager to keep on good terms with the formidable gang chieftain. His truck is innocent enough—as Bendig's companions ascertain—being loaded with empty crates and sacks. The farmer has been to market, and has sold his produce. He warns Bendig that both roads ahead, a mile beyond the fork, are covered by his foes. An old dray has been overturned on one, rendering it impassable, while the road under repair is covered by a group of gangsters who have mounted two machine guns.

Still Bendig will not turn back. He is daring and resourceful, and he undertakes to proceed by one of two roads from the fork, despite the dangerous presence of his enemies.

What does the gang leader, Bendig, do in this emergency?

The Man of Mystery will let you into the gangster's plan of action in the April issue of MYSTERY STORIES. There are methods that the gangster might have used that Jason didn't think of, but which may be equally as good as any our honorable President has up his sleeve. Now, all of you Sherlock Holmes aspirants, get together with your Watsons and see what you can do with this problem.

Your solutions should not exceed one hundred and fifty words. They must be received not later than February 5, 1928. They should be addressed to the Mystery Club, care of MYSTERY STORIES, 55 West Forty-second Street, New York City. No manuscripts can be returned.

The three answers that in the judgment of the editors are the best and most cleverly worked out will be published in the March issue of MYSTERY STORIES. These answers do not need to be similar to that of the man of Mystery. To each of the writers of these three answers the publishers of this magazine will send a book selected by the winner from the list of new publications given below:

THE OCTOPUS OF PARIS, by Gaston Leroux *(The Macaulay Co.)*.
THE WHISPERING CHORUS, by Perley Poore Sheehan *(G. H. Watt)*.
THE QUEEN'S GATE MYSTERY, by Herbert Adams *(J. B. Lippincott Co.)*.
THE WITNESS AT THE WINDOW, by Charles Barry *(E. P. Dutton & Co.)*.
THE DEVIL OF PEI-LING, by Herbert Asbury *(Macy-Massius)*.
VENETIAN KEY, by Allen Upward *(J. B. Lippincott Co.)*.
VIVANTI, by Sidney Horler *(George H. Doran Co.)*.
THE "CANARY" MURDER CASE, by S. S. Van Dine *(Charles Scribner's Sons)*.
SINISTER HOUSE, by Charles G. Booth *(William Morrow & Co., Inc.)*.
BEADS OF SILENCE, by Lillian Bamburg *(E. P. Dutton & Co.)*.
THE MAN IN THE SAND HILLS, by Anthony Marsden *(A. & C. Boni, Inc.)*.
THE TECHNIQUE OF THE MYSTERY STORY, by Carolyn Wells *(The Home Correspondence School)*.

This month the Mystery Club welcomes three new members to its midst. Their solutions of Problem Number Three, THE MYSTERY OF THE SEALED ROOM, which appeared in the December issue of MYSTERY STORIES, seem to us to be excellent and we believe that you will agree with our selection after you have read them.

The first solution is that given by Everard Jason. The three which follow are those chosen by the editors.

SOLUTION by EVERARD JASON

The murdered usurer, T. Arthur Ambrose, was discovered in the sealed room of the summer hotel, where he had hidden himself away. He lay on his right side, with a ghastly wound in his throat, having been struck by a .22 calibre long, fired from a rifle. The wrist-watch on his left arm had been shattered by the bullet.

Ben, the vengeful murderer from whom Ambrose had vainly tried to conceal himself, had used smokeless powder and fired through a keyhole of one of the two locked and bolted doors. The hotel was an old-fashioned one, and had doors with key-holes large enough to permit a .22 calibre bullet to pass through. Ben fired as Ambrose paced the floor of the sealed room. The bullet struck Ambrose on the left wrist, shattered his watch, and was deflected up into his throat, causing the fatal wound. Though shattered, the watch, a large and cheap one, was strong enough to deflect the bullet upward at an acute angle. And the bullet, fired from a rifle at such close range, had sufficient velocity to kill Ambrose instantly.

Solution by B. B. G.

P. O. Box 449, Williamstown, Mass.

T. Arthur Ambrose was murdered in a seemingly inexplicable manner by Ben for the very obvious motive of vengeance. Ambrose was hidden in a room "with the doors and windows locked, bolted, and nailed shut."

A man standing or walking by a door naturally holds his wrist at the level of the key-hole of that door. If Ben shot Ambrose through the key-hole, a .22 bullet being able to pass through a key-hole of average size, the slug would have struck Ambrose's wrist-watch, providing that he had his left side turned toward the door. The bullet then would have glanced upward, which would have followed from the natural position of Ambrose's wrist. This would account for the *shattered* (not merely broken) wrist-watch. En route upward, the bullet would in all probability not travel nose first, but would spin end over end. On striking Ambrose's throat, the slug would inflict an unusual tearing wound, rather than a neat hole as would be made by a direct hit. Owing to the fact that it was a ricochet hit, much of the force of the bullet would be spent. Therefore, if the bullet passed through Ambrose's throat and hit the wall of the room, it would not leave an appreciable scar.

Solution by Don W. Bailey

415 Sixth St., Monaca, Penna.

How the murderer, Ben, got his man: He peeped through the key-hole in the door and saw his quarry pacing back and forth within the sealed room. The calibre of the bullet was small enough to allow it to pass through the key-hole; so he placed the muzzle of his gun against the key-hole, waited until Ambrose's footsteps betrayed the fact that he was in a line with it, then pulled the trigger. The bullet struck and shattered the large watch on Ambrose's left wrist, glanced upward, and tore a nasty hole in his throat.

The clues were: The sealed room, the small calibre of the bullet, the shattered wrist-watch, and the statement that the wound was ugly and curious. (A glancing bullet makes a nasty wound, especially a soft lead bullet such as the .22 long.)

Solution by Webster E. Perry, Jr.

129 Broadway, Ocean Grove, N. J.

Ben killed Ambrose in the following manner:

He tracked his quarry to the hotel, and found him in a room on the top story of the building.

However, Ambrose had foreseen Ben's arrival; he was secure—fortressed in the room. Unable to break in, Ben quietly descended to the room below, and overhead he heard the nervous steps of the man who knew that death awaited him just outside.

Seeing an old heat register in the ceiling above him, of the type popular twenty years ago, Ben quietly placed a chair under it, and, noiselessly thrusting his rifle through it and just as noiselessly sighting, timed his shot as Ambrose was directly over the muzzle of the rifle.

The shot was not perfect. Ben's eagerness resulted in the bullet's going off to one side. It hit the watch on the money-lenders wrist, and from there ricocheted up and hit him in the neck, a mortal wound. Ben left quietly when he heard the fall of his enemy.

EXCELLENT solutions were also sent in by those whose names are listed below. Everard Jason

thinks that they also should be raised to the rank of Detective Sergeant.

Victoria Donell, Harvey, Ill.; T. Y. Leo, New York, N. Y.; Oscar R. Brewer, Cincinnati, Ohio; Don T. Hastings, Detroit, Mich.; Lonnie Chong, Cleveland, Ohio; Ruth Slattery, New Haven, Conn.; Philip Koons, Holyoke, Mass.; Max Cohn, New York, N. Y.; P. A. Napier, Louisville, Ky.; Walter S. Austin, Grand Rapids, Mich.; Ronald S. MacKenzie, Framingham, Mass.

Involuntary Wolf-Men

By WILFRED HORNER

THERE is a story of a nobleman named Albertus Pericofcius, who lived in Russia four hundred years ago, and who tyrannized over his subjects and extorted from them nearly all that they produced. Once when he was absent from home his whole herd of cattle, which he had acquired in some crooked manner, died. When he returned and heard of the disaster, he broke into hideous cursing, saying, among other things: "Let him who has slain, eat. If God chooses, let him devour me as well." As he spoke, drops of blood fell to the ground, and in a moment he became a wild dog. In this form he rushed upon the dead cattle, tearing and devouring them. His wife died of horror. These events were attested to by alleged eye-witnesses. There was also a nobleman, near Prague, who robbed his subjects and reduced them almost to starvation. When he took the last cow from a poor widow, all his own cattle died. He burst into fearful oaths, so impious that he was changed into a dog, but the horror was aggravated by the fact that he retained his own human head.

It is related that St. Patrick changed Vereticus, King of Wales, into a wolf, and that St. Natalis cursed a whole prominent family in Ireland in this way for their heresy. Thereafter every male and female in that family was said to take the form of a wolf for seven years, living in forests and bogs, howling mournfully, and eating the sheep of the peasants. It is an old Armenian belief that there are women who, in punishment for certain heinous sins, are condemned to wander every night for seven years in the form of wolves. A demon comes to the woman with a wolf's skin, which he orders her to put on. As she draws it on, horrible wolfish cravings are born in her. She eats her own children, one by one, then the children of her kinspeople, then the children of friends, then of strangers. She wanders abroad only at night, and doors and locks spring open at her touch. As morning dawns, she doffs the wolf's skin and appears in her natural form, and no one, save perhaps members of her family, knows that she is a werwolf.

We Tell Our Readers

GOING UP!

The Circulation Department reports a gratifying increase in the circulation of MYSTERY STORIES during the past few months. We haven't the exact figures, but it is considerably over one hundred per cent. Best of all, the growth has been a steady one. And we feel sure that the good things we have in store for you will stimulate this growth. You can help, if you will. Tell your friends about MYSTERY STORIES. Tell us what you like or do not like in its contents. Many readers are doing this, but not nearly enough to satisfy us.

Let us introduce some of our authors in the current number.

R. D. KINGSLYN, who writes the complete novelette, THE INITIATION DEATH, tells us that he has a large variety of interests—tennis, baseball, the theatre, books, history and curiosity regarding the publishing business. In a later issue Mr. Kingslyn will have another story, which we believe will prove equally as intriguing as that in the present number.

LESLIE McFARLANE, whose story, TREATY MONEY, is illustrated on the front cover, knows his Northwest Mounted Police, having lived in their country since 1910. He writes us that he is a literary jack-of-all-trades, having written and had published everything from jokes to novels and from poems to musical comedies. Our readers will remember his unusual story, THE MAN WHO LOOKED BACK, which appeared in the November issue.

MARK PLUM creates a new fictional character of real distinction in JOHN SMITH INTERFERES. The writer lives in Illinois, in a little town which we understand is noted chiefly for its lilacs. We predict great things for this young author.

MOVIE STUFF introduces a writer new to MYSTERY STORIES—*H. M. SUTHERLAND.* Mr. Sutherland was forced to resign from his chosen profession of journalism on account of injuries received during the Great War, and is now spending his time in the mountains of Virginia, writing unusual fiction and following the hounds. You will hear from him again very soon.

PAUL ERNST, who tells the strange story of THE BLUE VASE, drifted into the office one day just before he left for a stay in Europe. Mr. Ernst spent some years in the Far East, of which he writes charmingly.

Don't you like MISS JUDAS? *JOHN BAER,* who wrote it, has given us a formidable list of his likes and dislikes. Baseball, hockey, boxing, poker, Mrs. Whiffen, Ed Wynn, beer, and thunder storms are all of interest to him. He hates snow, all kinds of hats, and (because he is playing invalid at the moment) medicine.

JEAN GILLESPIE hails from California, and it was while wandering about Grant Avenue and being politely ignored by ancient Chinamen that she got her inspiration for THE SEVENTH STRIPE.

ALVIN F. HARLOW and his series, FAMOUS UNSOLVED MYSTERIES, need no introduction. We're getting favorable comments right along.

There will be just as interesting a list of stories and authors in the March issue of MYSTERY STORIES—perhaps even more interesting. We're striving to make the magazine better, always better.

See next page for a few expressions of readers' opinions.

Our Readers Tell Us

Every month we will print on this page comments from our readers regarding the contents of MYSTERY STORIES.

For each letter which the Editor selects for publication the Publishers will send the writer Two Dollars.

Let us hear from you as soon as you have read this issue of the magazine. Write now!

DEAR EDITOR:

I read the December issue of MYSTERY STORIES in one night. The next day I could hardly keep awake. If I lose my position it will be your fault, because nobody should be permitted to assemble so many thrilling stories under one cover.

I read IT TAKES A THIEF, and the suspense was so great I could hardly wait to know the end. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's HOUDINI THE ENIGMA reads even more interestingly than fiction. I felt compelled to finish it at one sitting. And so with the other stories, with the exception of FIND THE WOMAN. In my opinion it's a rotten story, but I read even that to the end, always hoping for an improvement.

Sincerely yours,
JOSEPH GAROFALO,
Secauscus, New Jersey.

DEAR EDITOR:

The supreme test, to my mind, of interest and entertainment in a magazine is whether its stories are so well told that one will fight illness in order to read them.

The writer was ill, with a high fever and chills. He felt so badly that the words would seem to dance around before his eyes. And yet MYSTERY STORIES waded through this confused jumble of blurred vision and thought, brought sense out of chaos, and gave entertainment through long, weary hours. No other magazine could do that—and why?

1—Because there was no amateurishness in plot, characterization, or the telling of the stories. 2—They held the interest from the very first word to the last. 3—The stories were different. 4—The magazine does not give one the usual impression of cheapness. 5—Most of the stories are good, not only a few. To me, the most prominent feature is that the authors are of a higher grade than one might have expected, and the stories reflect this excellence.

More power to MYSTERY STORIES. May its high excellence never falter.

Very truly,
WILLIAM C. CRUMP,
Pasadena, California.

DEAR EDITOR:

Just want to let you know that the FAMOUS UNSOLVED MYSTERIES, by Alvin F. Harlow, which have been appearing in your late numbers, have been most enjoyable to me, and I trust I shall have the pleasure of reading many more of them. Mystery stories have always appealed to me very strongly.

Yours sincerely,
WILLIAM F. FRENCH,
Hollywood, Cal.

DEAR EDITOR:

The new MYSTERY STORIES certainly is a peach. I have just finished the December issue, and I enjoyed every single story in the book. Your covers are particularly interesting, quite an improvement over the old ones. I have been following every instalment of LONG SHADOWS, and can hardly wait till I see how the tale ends.

I hope you'll go on printing some more of the FAMOUS UNSOLVED MYSTERIES by Alvin F. Harlow. Yours for more magazines like this last one.

Yours very truly,
ARTHUR A. EISENSTADT,
Bronx, New York.

DEAR EDITOR:

Will you please pardon my temerity in submitting a comment on the articles published in your magazine? I have enjoyed, particularly, the recent issues. For many years I have been reading detective stories for mental recreation and possible edification, and I am disposed to be critical in respect to the impossible situations and imitative attitude portrayed by various authors.

The above criticism does not apply to MYSTERY STORIES. I desire to compliment the magazine particularly on the recent series of FAMOUS UNSOLVED MYSTERIES by Mr. Harlow. I hope that Mr. Harlow will continue to furnish the magazine with further reports of his researches along these lines. I think that such articles, based on historical facts, are of more value and interest than many stories produced by wild imagination.

I trust that MYSTERY STORIES will continue to maintain its high standard of literary attainment.

Respectfully,
J. F. HOWARD, M. D.,
Denver, Colorado.

The Universal University

EDUCATION is one thing that is necessary to everyone who wishes to get ahead these days. The rapidity of the life we are living requires that each one of us be a specialist—unusually well trained—in some particular line of work.

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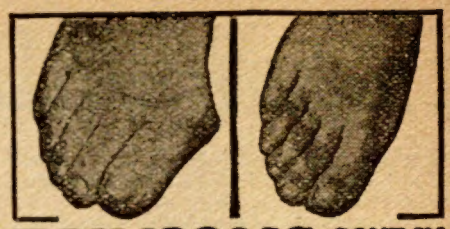

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THE MOST MYSTERIOUS HAPPENING OF MY LIFE

If You Were Dying To-night

and I offered you something that would give you ten years more to live, would you take it? You'd grab it. Well, fellows, I've got it, but don't wait till you're dying or it won't do you a bit of good. It will then be too late. Right now is the time. To-morrow or any day, some disease will get you and if you have not equipped yourself to fight it off, you're gone. I don't claim to cure disease. I am not a medical doctor, but I'll put you in such condition that the doctor will starve to death waiting for you to take sick. Can you imagine a mosquito trying to bite a brick wall? A fine chance.

A Re-built Man

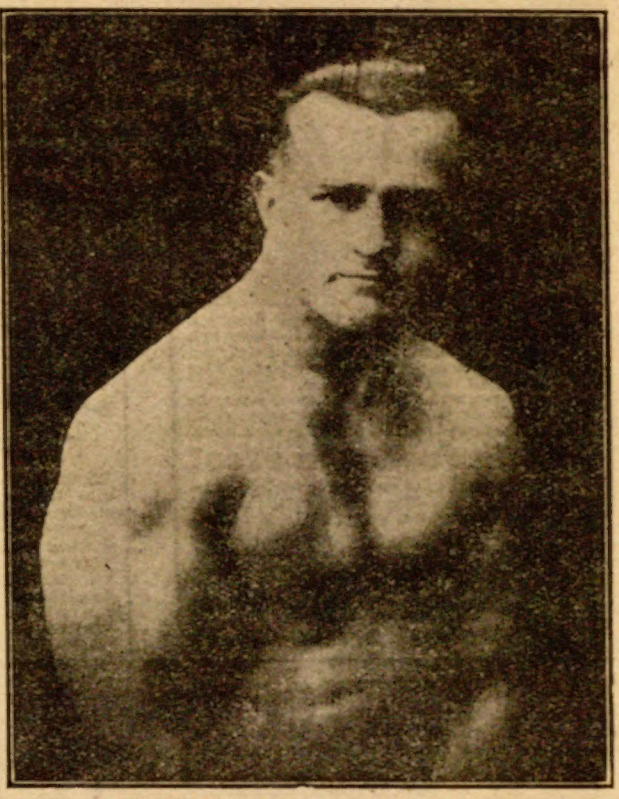
I like to get the weak ones. I delight in getting hold of a man who has been turned down as hopeless by others: It's easy enough to finish a task that's more than half done. But give me the weak, sickly chap and watch him grow stronger. That's what I like. It's fun to me because I know I can do it and I like to give the other fellow the laugh. I don't just give you a veneer of muscle that looks good to others. I work on you both inside and out. I not only put big, massive arms and legs on you, but I build up those inner muscles that surround your vital organs. The kind that give you real pep and energy, the kind that fire you with ambition and the courage to tackle anything set before you.

All I Ask is Ninety Days

Who says it takes years to get in shape? Show me the man who makes any such claims and I'll make him eat his words. I'll put one full inch on your arm in just 3 days. Yes, and two full inches on your chest in the same length of time. Meanwhile, I'm putting life and pep into your old backbone. And from then on just watch 'em grow. At the end of thirty days you won't know yourself. Your whole body will take on an entirely different appearance. But you've only started. Now comes the real work. I've only built my foundation. I want just 60 days more (90 in all) and you'll make those friends of yours who think they're strong look like something the cat dragged in.

A Real Man

When I'm through with you, you're a real man. The kind that can prove it. You will be able to do things that you had thought impossible. And the beauty of it is you keep on going. Your deep full chest breathes in rich pure air, stimulating your blood and making you just bubble over with vim and vitality. Your huge, square shoulders, and your massive muscular arms have that craving for the exercise of a regular he man. You have the flash to your eye and the pep to your step that will make you admired and sought after in both the business and social world.



EARLE E. LIEDERMAN, "The Muscle Builder," Author of "Science of Wrestling," "Muscle Building," "Here's Health," "Secrets of Strength," "Endurance," etc.

This is no idle prattle, fellows. If you doubt me, make me prove it. Go ahead. I like it. I have already done this for thousands of others and my records are unchallenged. What I have done for them I will do for you. Come then, for time flies and every day counts. Let this very day be the beginning of new life to you.

Send for my new 64-page book **"MUSCULAR DEVELOPMENT"** IT IS FREE

It contains forty-eight full-page photographs of myself and some of the many prize-winning pupils I have trained. Some of these came to me as pitiful weaklings, imploring me to help them. Look them over now, and you will marvel at their present physiques. This book will prove an impetus and a real inspiration to you. It will thrill you through and through. This will not obligate you at all, but for the sake of your future health and happiness, do not put it off. Send to day—right now, before you turn this page.

EARLE E. LIEDERMAN
Dept. 301, 305 Broadway, New York City

EARLE E. LIEDERMAN 4202
Dept. 301, 305 Broadway, N. Y. City.

Dear Sir:—Please send me, without any obligation on my part whatever, a copy of your latest book, "Muscular Development." (Please write or print plainly.)

Name .....

Street .....

City..... State.....

Carlton Representatives Doubled Their Incomes in 1927
Company's Sales Showed 100% Gain
Carlton is Nationally Known

Make $5000 in 1928 Yourself

With The Carlton Line!

TIE UP WITH A SUCCESSFUL COMPANY

No Experience Necessary—No Investment Required—Every minute right from the start, is to be profitable to you. Part time or Full time .... Day time or Night time .... An opportunity wherein your success is only dependent upon your "Willingness to Try!" ....

You progress as your company progresses. Carlton's successful sales policy has placed this organization and its representatives in a position of field leadership — 1928 will mark the greatest year in Carlton history.

ILLUSTRATED above . . . . The famous Carlton Sample Outfit—the book that is making this entire country a play-ground of Big Money Earning for Carlton Representatives . . . . the records of 1927 certainly prove it!

Between its two covers . . . the nationally known Carlton Custom-Quality Line of Men's Dress, Work and Sport Shirts, Neckwear, Underwear, Pajamas — the easiest to sell Men's Wear Line in America . . . . and again the records of 1927 to prove it!

Year Round Business -Ever Active Market

Through you, we go direct to the vast American market of 35 million responsive prospects—ever new . . never exhaustible! . . . .

All you have to do is show the sample book, quote the low prices and take order after order without effort.

Carlton defrays full transportation charges, collects balances due and guarantees customer satisfaction.

If you prefer, begin by devoting spare time . . . your earnings will soon justify full time to Carlton's big-money-earning proposition.

Carlton actually puts you in business for yourself—gives your ambitions full play, and makes every minute of your association profitable.

Biggest Commissions Bonuses in Addition

You are paid daily — in cash. Each sale carries biggest commissions. Simplicity of plan makes Carlton proposition easy for you to grasp—and easy for you to start right out and show surprising results.

Carlton's Bonus Plan is the most successful earnings booster in the direct selling field—payable regularly and repeatedly, in units from $25.00 to $300.00. Explanation of Bonus Plan as well as details on Carlton's 40% Profit Sharing Plan furnished with outfit.

Profit Sharing is paid to Carlton representatives in addition to all other sources of Carlton incomes.

Complete Outfit FREE

Put it in Your Pocket and Put $100 a Week in with it.

Upon receipt by us of special coupon to the right, you will be promptly furnished with complete sample outfit—the most elaborate selling kit in the field, containing hundreds of beautifully mounted, large sized swatches of the actual merchandise. Order books, supplies and valuable selling helps included with outfit.

There is no time like "at once" when an opportunity such as this one presents itself to you. Fill in and mail the coupon—your outfit will go forward by return post—prepaid. In less than a week, you will shake hands thankfully with the hand that wrote the coupon.

OUTFIT FREE

I'll supply complete selling equipment—and accept your ambition as my "receipt in full"

C E Mandel Pres.

Carlton Mills, Inc.

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114 FIFTH AVENUE
NEW YORK - N.Y.

MAIL COUPON TODAY

C. E. MANDEL, Pres. Dept. 334-G
Carlton Mills, Inc.
114 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y.

Dear Mr. Mandel:

Send me the Free Carlton Outfit by return mail -- prepaid. I am ready to put The Carlton Line and your Big Money Earning guarantee to a test!

Name.....

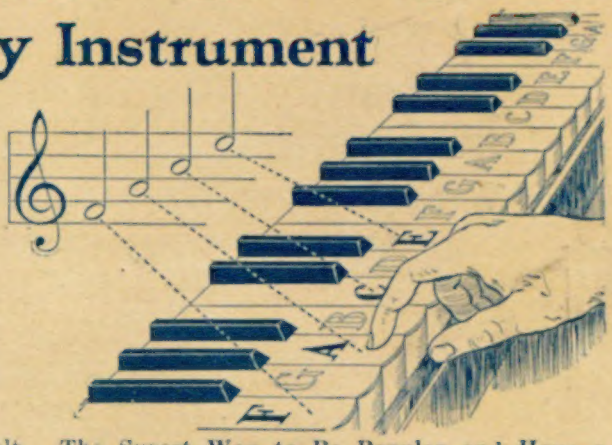
Address.....

City.....State.....

Start your success at once-Sparetime or full time

Easy as A–B–C !

You Can Play Any Instrument In a Few Months This Delightful New Easy Way!



Quickest because natural and pleasant. Grateful students say they learn in a fraction of the time old dull methods required. You play direct from the notes. And the cost averages only a few cents a lesson!

LEARNING music is no longer a difficult task. If you can read the alphabet, you can now quickly learn to play your favorite instrument! A delightful new method has made it positively easy to become a capable performer within just a few months. And the cost is only a *fraction* of what people used to spend on the old, slow methods!

You don't need a private teacher, this new way. You study entirely at home, in the privacy of your own room, with no one to interrupt or embarrass you. And, strange as it may seem, you'll enjoy every minute of it—because the new method is *agreeable* as well as *rapid!*

No Tricks or Stunts—You Learn from "Regular" Music

You don't have to know the first thing about music in order to begin. You learn to play from actual notes, just like the best musicians do. And almost before you realize your progress, you begin playing real tunes and melodies instead of just scales. There are no trick "numbers," no "memory stunts." When you finish the U. S. School of Music course, you can pick up any piece of regular printed music and understand it! You'll be able to read music, popular and classic, and play it from the notes. You'll acquire a life-long ability to please your friends, amuse yourself, and, if you like, make money (musicians are highly paid for their pleasant work).

Whether you like the piano, violin, 'cello, organ, saxophone, or any other instrument, you can now learn to play it in an amazingly short time. By means of this wonderful newly perfected method reading and playing music is made almost as simple as reading aloud from a book. You simply can't go wrong. First, you are *told* how a thing is done, then a picture *shows* you how, then you do it yourself and *hear* it. No private teacher could make it any clearer. The lessons come to you by mail at regular intervals. They consist of complete printed instructions, diagrams, all the music you need, and music paper for writing out test exercises. And if anything comes up which is not *entirely plain*, you can write to your instructor and get a full, prompt, personal reply!

The Surest Way to Be Popular and Have a Good Time

Do you sit "on the sidelines" at a party? Are you out of it because you can't play? Many, many people are! It's the musician who claims attention. If you play, you are always in demand. Many invitations come to you. Amateur orchestras offer you wonderful afternoons and evenings. And you meet the kind of people you have always wanted to know. So don't miss this exceptional opportunity.

Learn to Play by Note

Piano	'Cello
Organ	Harmony and Composition
Violin	
Drums and Traps	Sight Singing
Banjo (Plectrum, 5-String, or Tenor)	Guitar
	Ukulele
	Hawaiian Steel Guitar
Mandolin	Harp
Clarinet	Cornet
Flute	Piccolo
Saxophone	Trombone

Voice and Speech Culture
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